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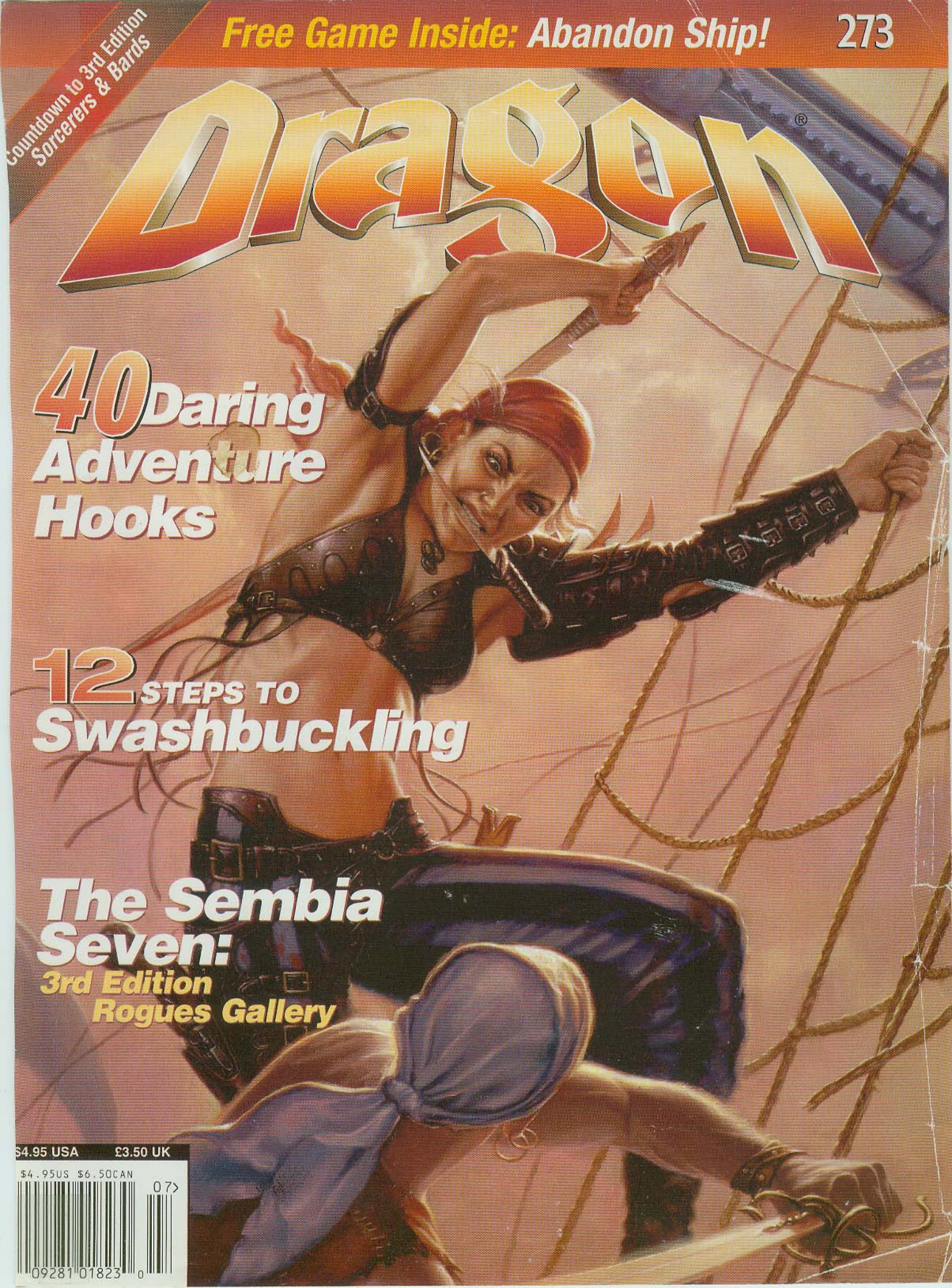

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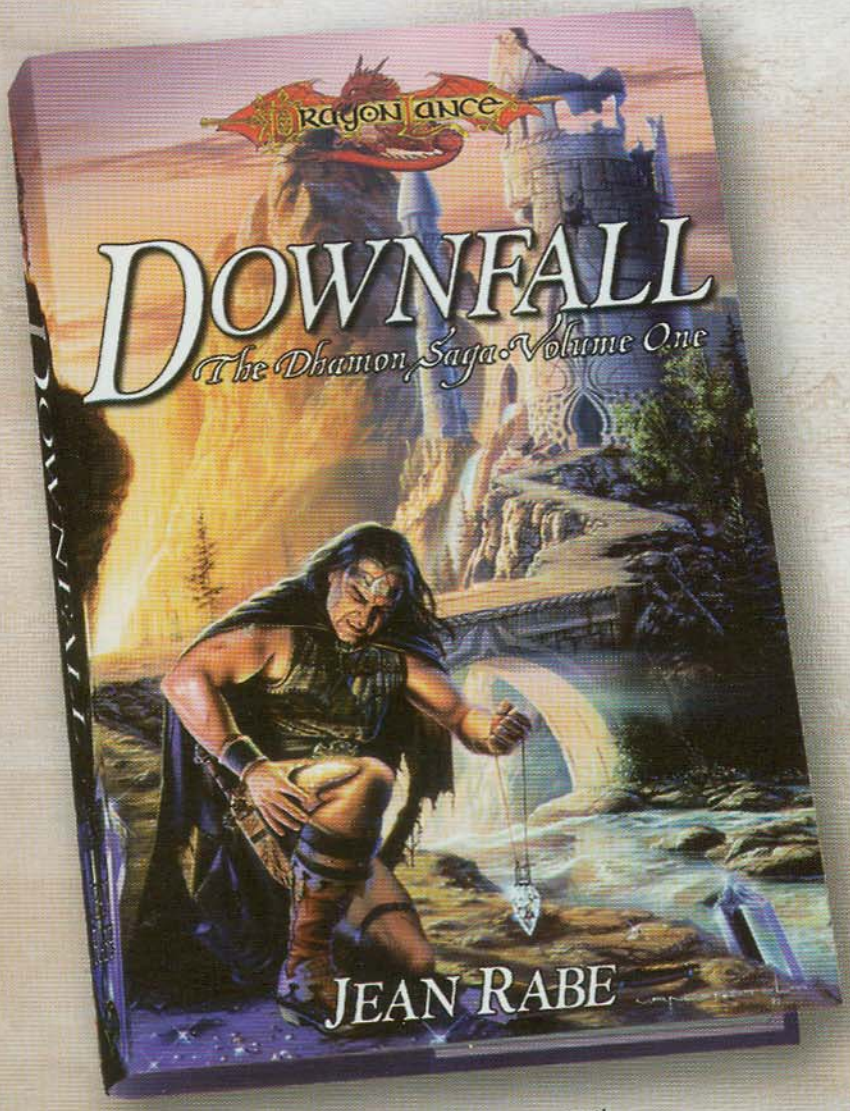

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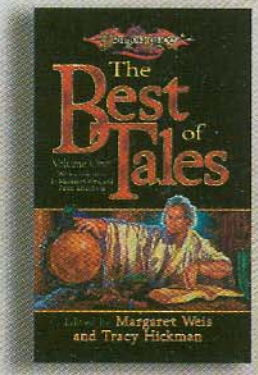

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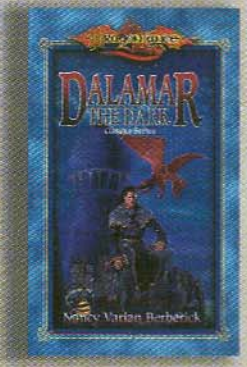

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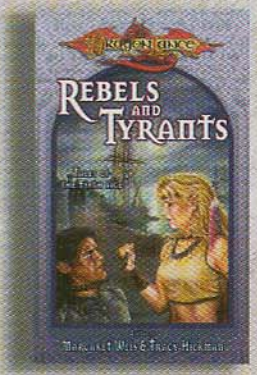

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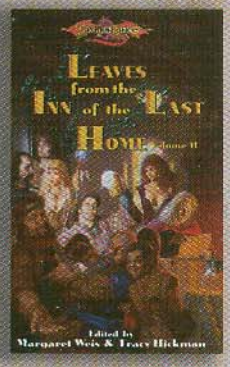

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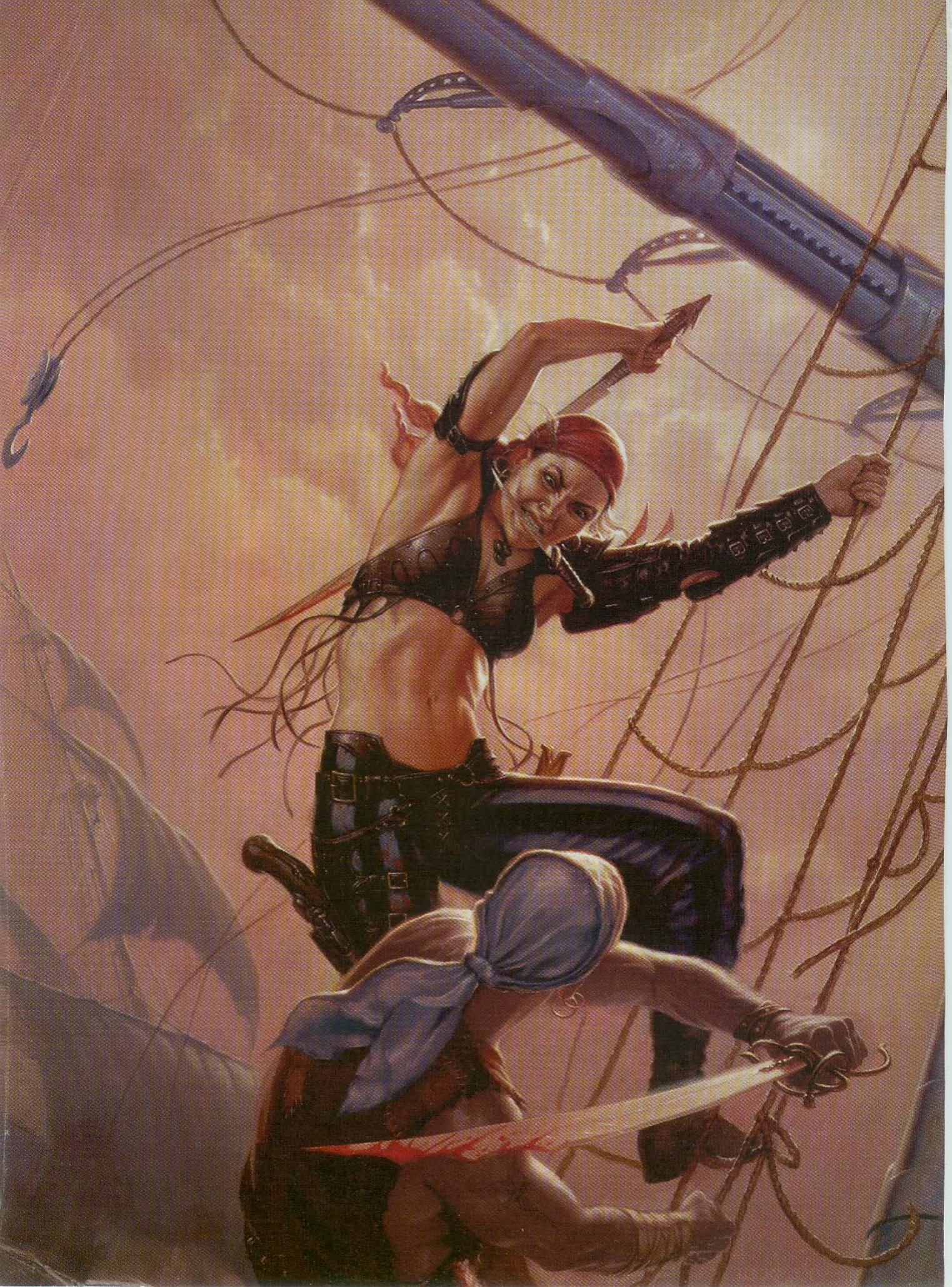

SWASHBUCKLING

Dragon®

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About this month's swashbuckling cover subject, artist Todd Lockwood has this to say: "She's got the upper hand–she's got position and angle. The poor slob beneath her is trying a return stroke, but the rat-lines are in the way. He's already cut them once, and he's trying not to fall off. He's going to die. That's rk post, by the way. The victim, not the girl.

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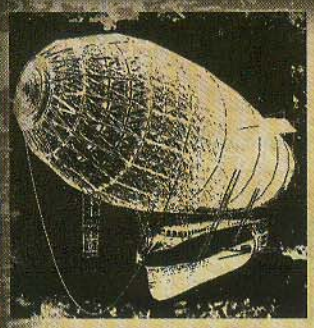

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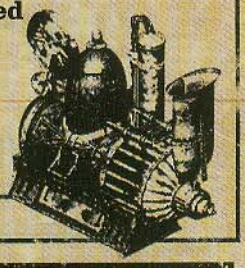

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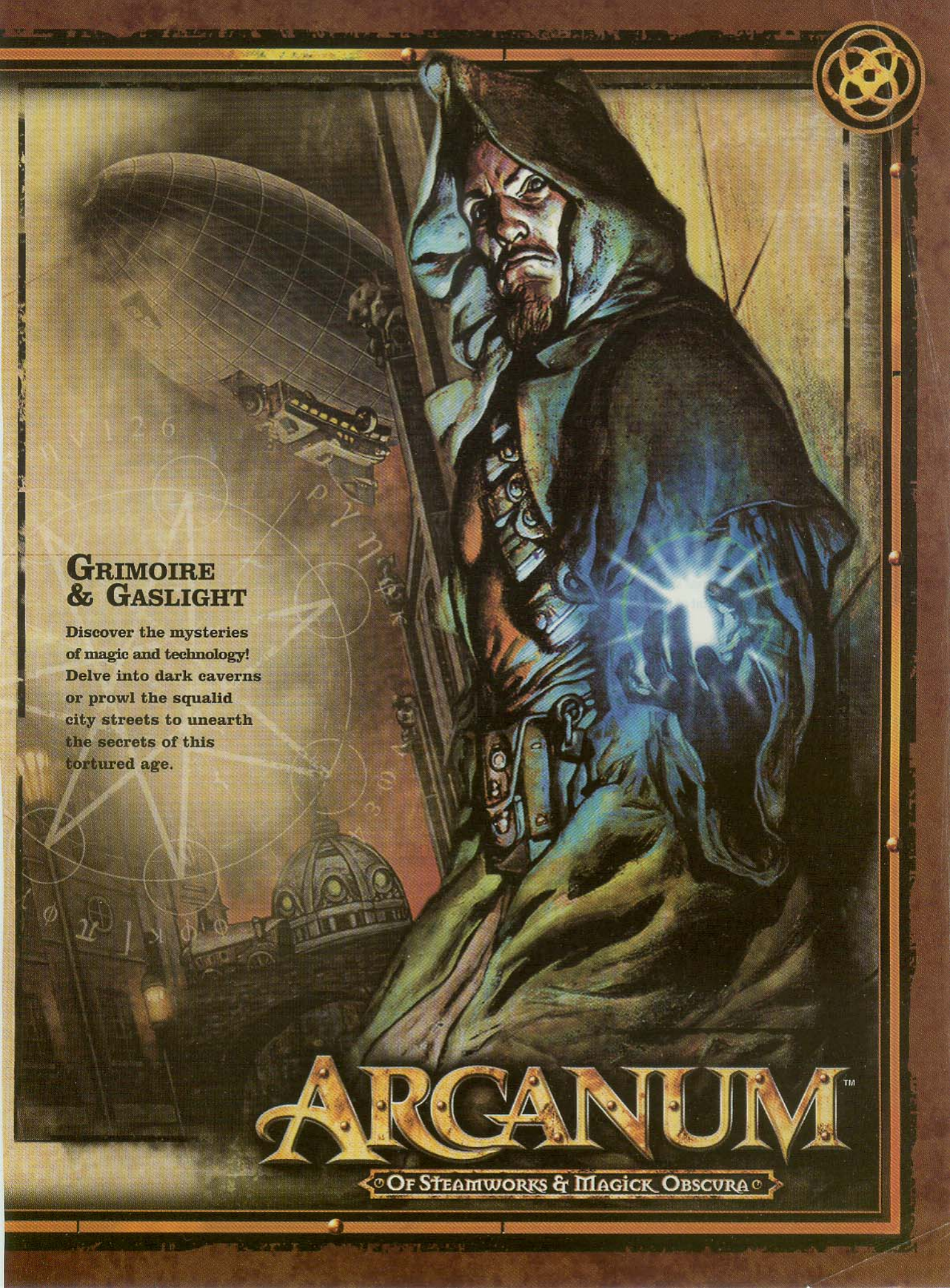
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Time Traveling

The concept of time is problematic in AD&D® 2nd Edition, a muddled mess as Chris Perkins describes it. (He assures me that time is a snap in 3rd Edition.) The order of play for simultaneous events and the probable outcome has led to many a heated debate between players and their DM. In real time, events occur in the order they happen, and the outcome is what we live with. Real time seems to be a much simpler thing. Or is it?

For the past 10 years my name has appeared on the masthead of this magazine. Magazines are linear in nature; the next issue follows the last in regular fashion. I have an issue for each of the last 120 months of my life (more if you count the Annuals). But that's only one way to measure time. What of the simultaneous events?

During the past decade this magazine has seen 5 editors, 4 publishers and 3 owners. We've watched the computer dramatically change how we produce our magazine, how we design and play our games, even how we live our lives. The time that I used to spend on the phone with illustrators is now spent responding to e-mail. Nearly half of the artwork in an issue now arrives on disk rather than in bulky Express packages.

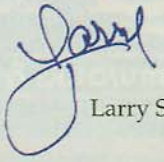
Real time seems to be a much simpler thing.

There is no point in debating the outcome of events in real time. Life, as the saying goes, is what happens while we're making other plans. And, after ten years with *DRAGON® Magazine*, the time has come for me to make other plans.

There's a danger in doing the same thing for too long. Maybe it's a middle-age thing, but I've been listening to the little voice in my head that's been telling me it's time for another adventure. So, my girlfriend and I have decided to leave the city lights and the rain of Seattle behind for a few months to camp our way across country and back. Along the way we'll visit many of the freelancers that I've been working with over the years. It's going to be great seeing them on their own turf, as we generally only get together at GEN CON® Game Fair or when they made the occasional trip to the office. (It'll be a pleasure to have a home-cooked meal and get our laundry done, too!)

The gaming community, those that create the games as well as those that play them, are a great bunch of people. If you're playing only with your local group, let me tug on your coattails a bit and encourage you to attend one of the cons in a state bordering yours. You'll meet people that share your interests and probably strike up friendships that will last a lifetime. Don't let your sense of adventure end at the gaming table.

Figuring out real time is no less tricky than figuring out game time. Basically it comes down to chance, a bit of luck, and establishing priorities. It's been my luck to have the chance to work for ten years with some truly great people. I'll miss seeeing them on a daily basis. But for the next few months, my priorities are to get more exercise, lose a few pounds, quit smoking and stay out of the rain. How's that for simultaneous events!



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By the author of *Rhapsody*

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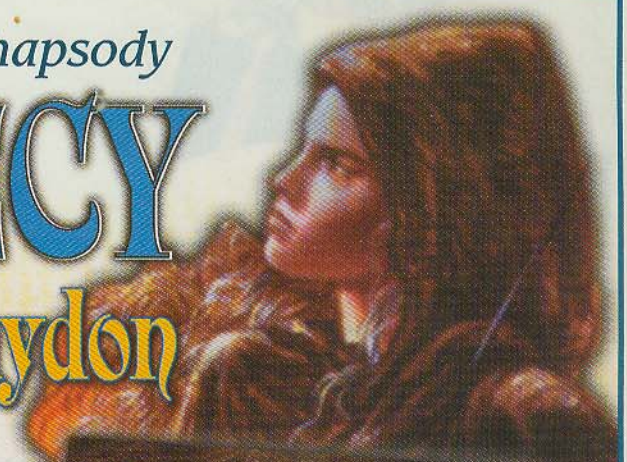
Elizabeth Haydon



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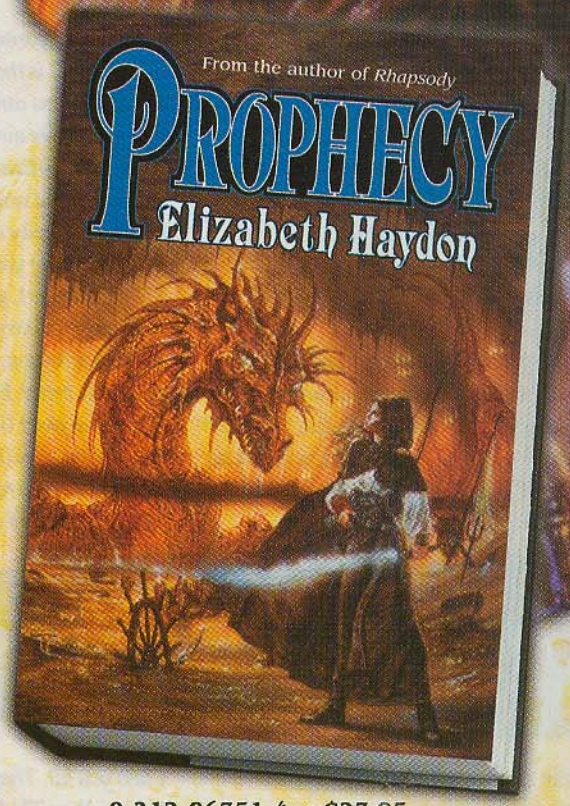
—*Romantic Times* (4½ stars out of 5)



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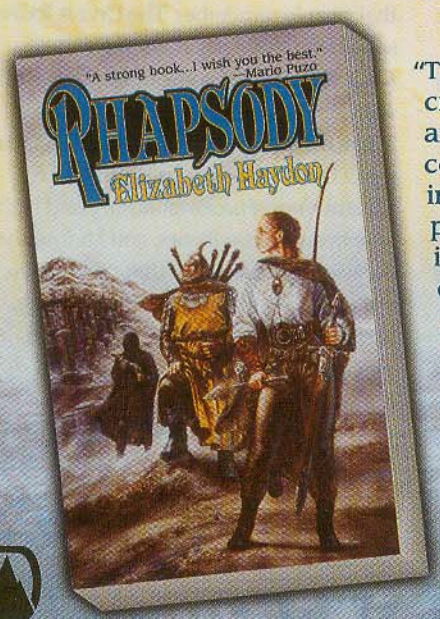

"The tale's credible mythology and ancient lore; its characters, who are convincing in personality, powers, and interrelationships; a truly menacing evil presence and leavening humor combine ina truly satisfying fantasy adventure that ends on just the right note to leave rapt readers craving a sequel."
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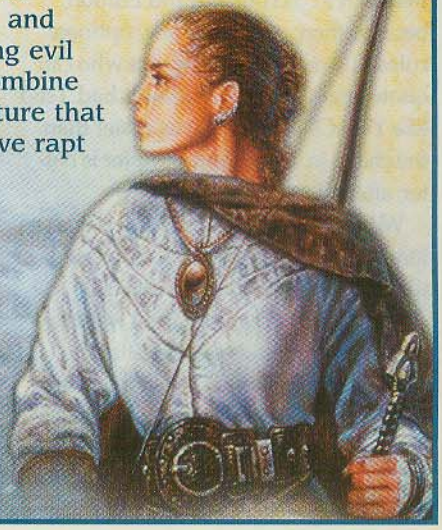

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Let the Kids Play

I have been playing the D&D® game since 1976 as a player and DM. I am glad that you have reprinted some 1st Edition material. This has become more important to me because 3rd Edition scares me, and I had hoped to teach the D&D game to my kids and be a cool dad.

How do I teach my eight-year-old to play?

Read your own "Dungeoncraft" column. Simpler is better; you can always add more. Every thing I read in *DRAGON® Magazine* tells me 3rd Edition will not be simple. If I cannot be a DM to my kids, what future does D&D have?

How do I pull [the kids] away from the computer to D&D if it's more like work than play?

With computer-based RPGs like *Daggerfall* that are becoming easier to play, how do I pull them away from the computer to D&D if it's more like work than play? I did not like 2nd Edition because there were too many optional rules. Too many rules lawyers who can quote pages and paragraphs is bad. I did like THAC0 because it was easier than the charts in 1st Edition. Simpler is better, after all.

Will 3rd Edition (as 1st Edition was, so long ago) be supported by many modules to make the DM's job easier?

I love the D&D game, and I want to teach my grandkids one day. But the game won't be there if I can't teach my kids and their friends to play today.

Robert Haavind
La Crosse, WI

One of our favorite things about the new edition of D&D is that it's simple without being simplistic. You can teach a beginning player the basics more quickly than you could with 1st or 2nd Edition, but as you develop the characters and campaign, you can add as much complexity as you like, over time.

Considering your own example of THAC0, Robert, you should find 3rd Edition even easier to learn and teach than previous editions. Like you, the designers believe that simpler is better. For example, there's one experience chart (instead of six), three saving throw categories (instead of five), and you always *want to roll high. In fact, with attack rolls, the result of your roll is the Armor Class you hit. That's even simpler and easier to learn than THAC0.*

Even outside of DUNGEON® *Adventures, which prints four to six D&D adventures every two months, Wizards of the Coast will produce a regular series of "Adventure Path" modules, which we've been lucky enough to playtest for the past couple of months. One of them transformed an editor's girlfriend from mildly interested bystander to game geek in only three sessions.*

While none of the editors has tried to teach kids yet, the cats have caught on pretty well.

Raves & Reviews

J. Gregory Keyes is incredible. Your magazine introduced me to his books, which I love. His short stories are also a lot of fun in a sword-and-sorcery-with-a-twist kind of way.

Gygax's columns are very important. Some people, who might be hit a little too close to home by them, might complain, but the columns do a vital service in helping to reduce the fragmentation in the gaming community. Keep printing them.

I like the cartoons; humor is essential. The quality of art is more consistent than in the game supplements Wizards of the Coast publishes.

However, most of us have all of the new magic items, spells, PC races, and monsters we could ever use. I understand that these sorts of articles generate less controversy than ones that rely on long-term stories that work better for some campaigns than others, but at the end of the day, it's the campaign cornerstones like Eric L. Boyd's "City of Sunken Spires," Roger E. Moore's "Village of Elmshire," and Ed Bonny's older articles on the Plane of Shadow and night hags that people remember. The DIVINE RIGHT series from the early days of *DRAGON Magazine* stand as some of the greatest work the magazine has ever produced. There might be a segment of readers that think they want easy "plug-ins" like variant *rings of necromantic fury* and eight new breeds of owlbears, and I admit that occasionally I see something that I love, but in practicality they're unnecessary, and they drive those who browse the magazine at the bookstore (and find nothing of interest) away.

Rip Van Wormer
Midland, MI

We hear you on the "plugins," Rip, but we also hear a lot of raves and requests for more of them. Our response is to give you both the plugins and thought-provoking articles that

should inspire your imagination without doing all the work for you. Especially during the transition from 2nd to 3rd Edition, look for more of these latter articles—and let us know whether they're what you were hoping to see.

Clerical Concerns

Gygax's new column has taken a lot of heat on the net and in "D-Mail" as being unworthy of print. Generally, it is not my cup of tea either, and I skim through it pretty quickly when I receive new issues of *DRAGON Magazine* in the mail, but the column is preferable to:

- Sorry, but I really don't care much about the biographies of game designers and artists in "Profiles." I did not like it when *DRAGON Magazine* did it back in the early issues, and I don't appreciate the column now either. I'm sure the designers are all nice people, but I really don't want to read about them.
- Most of your fantasy fiction is not very good, and this is the biggest waste of *DRAGON Magazine* resources and space. The magazine must pay quite a bit of money to these authors, but does anyone really read the stories? Wouldn't we rather have more gaming material than another lightweight, clichéd story? Please dump the fiction, or at least curtail its appearance to every three issues or so. Another good suggestion I read on the net is to tie the fiction to a recently published D&D adventure. For example, fiction dealing with "Gates of Firestorm Peak" or "Slavers" might pique my interest, but I skip fiction that has little or no relationship with the D&D game.
- PC Portraits is kiddie filler and another waste of space. The game takes place in our imagination, and that is much more powerful than some poorly sketched, thumbnail portrait.
- All the cartoons and strips except KoDT are filler. "Nodwick," "Unspeakable Oaf," and the others, including "What's New!"—of which I used to be a big fan—just waste space that could be spent on gaming material. Some of the DRAGONMIRTH™ cartoons are good, but most of them are superfluous.

All of the above are worse than Gygax's column, in my opinion, and I'm not a big fan of that either. In my mind, *DRAGON Magazine* is first and foremost a gaming magazine that should be chock full of material for use in gaming. I don't play the MARVEL SUPERHEROES® Adventure Game and never will, but I'd rather see an article about it than any of the filler above. I would even be interested in seeing an article or two about improving and setting up the gaming environment like the letter and picture from the fellow with the cool gaming set-up a number of issues before. I also miss "Current Clack," which kept us all up to date on the current goings-on in the gaming industry. Yes, most of that information can be culled from the net, but it is convenient to have it all in one place.

While I'm writing, I wish you would also make the cover less busy. It just distracts from the painting and makes *DRAGON Magazine* look like any other cheesy magazine on the newsstand. The first thing that is going to catch a potential buyer's eye is the painting, not the words. Make the words and the logo small, and let the painting draw in new potential readers. Give it a classic look like the very old *DRAGON Magazine* covers, and it will catch people's attention.

I am a long-time reader of the magazine with a complete collection, and I greatly enjoy most of the magazine. However, please give us more gaming

Player and DM of the Month

Derek Weatherdon deserves to be DM of the Month *and* Player of the Month!

We called Derek's campaign "Planet of the Orcs." He took the GREYHAWK world and adapted all six movies of the acclaimed *Planet of the Apes* series into an amazing adventure. There was a period of magic loss, and all the nonhuman characters were certain they would die in that time. Every day, the "unnaturals" took damage as a side effect of the magic disappearing, and we couldn't recover the spells we cast. Add to this the construction of the "Greyhawk Tower," which we came across in ruins in the next era.

In the end, we had to bargain with tanar'ri for a way off the soon to be magic-deprived Greyhawk, only to end up in Graz'zt's realm! This finale will always stick out in my mind, as my tiefling character started hacking apart the coffin on a minor evil deity that we brought with us, our bargaining chip to get off Greyhawk. This concerned Graz'zt, who wanted him as bait for some scheme, but the demon's awakening distracted him long enough for the rest of the PCs to beat a *teleport* effect out of a nearby vrock. The good news was the PCs were all saved. The bad news is we were scattered across the outer planes, and only one of us returned to Greyhawk.

Derek deserves the Player of the Month award for his masterful portrayal of a Bard named Finn. I had the pleasure of running a PLANESCAPE® version of a heavily modified *Desert of Desolation* module for him and some very young players at our local gaming club.I was worried initially, because most of the kids were the type that would "waste it with my crossbow!" With Derek's help, I was able to run some memorable sessions. The one that stands out foremost was when the Sandcutters (the adventuring troupe) were attacked one night by a wraithworm. Instead of jumping into the fray, Finn jumped back and began writing the "Tale of the Sandcutters." A timid young player was still not sure how this D&D game worked but realized his friends needed help. So Lief, his elf, boldly ran forward... and got a natural 20 on the worm! Finn immediately proclaimed, "And the elf, twenty feet tall if an inch, slew the mighty beast!" This boast immediately eased the group's tension, and Lief was sorely missed when he finally died many sessions later.

To this day (nearly two years after the adventure), I still have those players ask when I'll run another PLANESCAPE game, and whether Derek will be in town to play it.

—Carl Gutbrod

material that can be used for and during gaming and less profiles of designers, silly portraits, boring and useless fiction, and uninteresting cartoons.

William K. McCarthy
Flushing, NY

Musings on the March Issue

I wanted to share my thoughts on issue #269. I have to say the last couple issues of the magazine have, in my opinion, been the best in a while. I enjoyed the theme of this issue, "Into the Wild," as wilderness adventures have always been a favorite of mine. The articles "Animal Henchmen" and "Herbcraft" were very good, as was the article on satyrs. It was good to see another Seasons of the Witch painting from Larry Elmore.

The installment of "Greyhawk Grimoires" was appreciated, and "The Ecology of the Pseudodragon" was my favorite feature. It was well thought out and fun to read. I have, over the years, gradually tired of the various "Ecology" articles, but this was one of the best in a long time. Kudos to Johnathan Richards for a great article. As always, I got a good laugh out of "Knights of the Dinner Table" and "Shopkeep."

As for the 3rd Edition countdown, I have to say that I like what I am seeing so far. It appears that character classes are going to be more customizable than in the past, which is something we have been doing with house rules for years. It also appears that skills are finally going to be an integral part of the game, rather than an afterthought. This is also a welcome change.

I was reading recently on the website about the LIVING GREYHAWK™ campaign, and I see it has been unveiled in this issue of the magazine as well. While I am happy to see the GREYHAWK setting get this kind of attention, I am disappointed that there will be little or no official development of the setting and apparently very few game products. It is amazing to me that after all these years, there have been so few sourcebooks released for the GREYHAWK setting, relative to other campaign settings. I don't think that RPGA® events should be the only game in town for the GREYHAWK setting. Non-RPGA home campaigns seem to be getting short shrift.

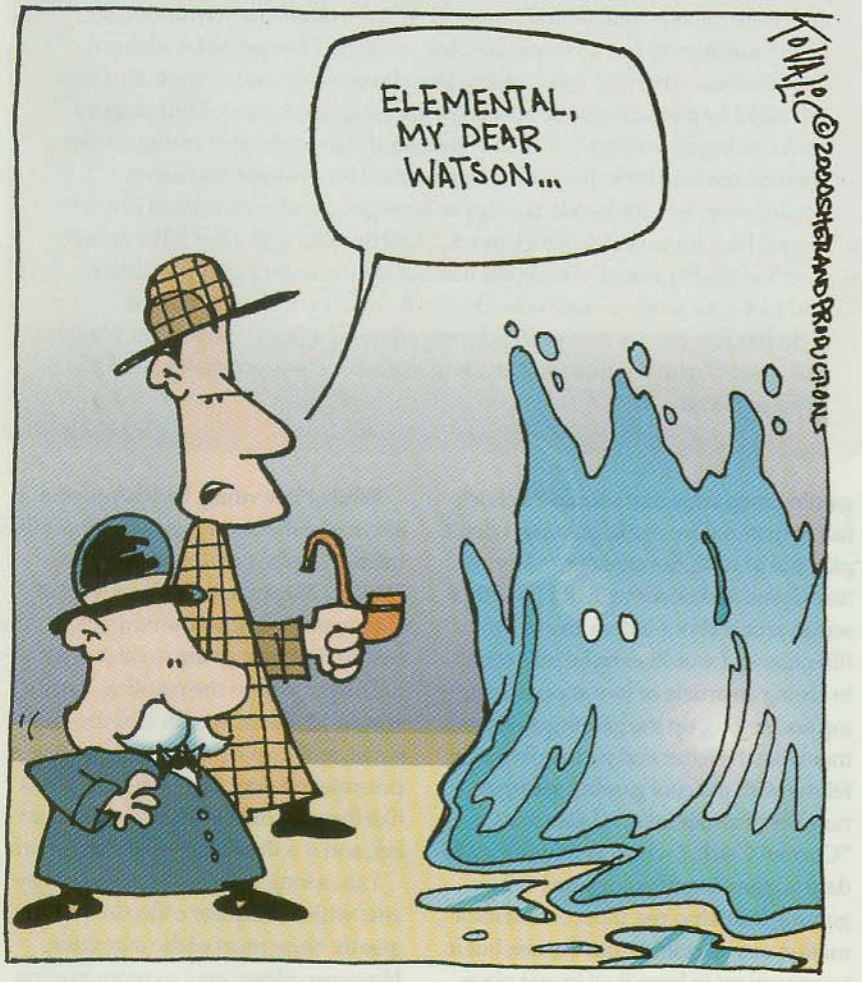
Greg Hill
Grand Rapids, MI

Resembling *White Dwarf*?

This is another disgusting letter of praise from an adoring fan. (I have never written such a letter before, so indulge me.) I first subscribed to *DRAGON Magazine* in 1989, and the magazine is a lot better now than it was then. First of all, the visual presentation in the magazine has improved tremendously in the past few years. I was especially impressed by the illustration of the woman giving birth on page 33 of issue #263. Ten years ago, such an illustration, despite its quality, would never have been published in the magazine for fear of offending the small-minded. I also like the inclusion of historically based articles, such as the Dark Ages pantheon of the aforementioned issue, or the Egyptian characters from issue #269. I am thrilled to death at the revival of such features as "Giants in the Earth" and "What's New," coupled with your removal of Gary Gygax's *persona non grata* status with the magazine. It shows you are combining what worked in the past with your vision for the game's future.

Of course, I have a bone to pick. My voice joins the chorus calling for the return of "Role-Playing Reviews." *DRAGON Magazine* has become an in-house magazine devoted exclusively to Wizards of the Coast products, and including reviews of other companies' games could help expand the magazine's horizons. If it could be done in the late '80s and early '90s, why can't it be done now? "Role-Playing Reviews" is a great way to introduce gamers to products they might not otherwise hear of, and in the past the quality of writing in the reviews in *DRAGON Magazine* surpassed most of what I've seen on the web. Without such features as "Role-Playing Reviews," the magazine might go the way of Games Workshop's *White Dwarf*, serving as little more than an

The Unspeakable Oaf by John Kovalic



uncritical advertisement for products from the parent company.

All in all, however, I must say that *Dragon Magazine* is evidence that the hobby, far from deteriorating, is actually improving with age—at least with regard to the quality of its product. Compare this month's issue of *Dragon Magazine* with one from 10, 15, or 20 years ago, and you'll see what I mean. While we gamers enjoy whining more than anything else, I feel obliged to give credit when it's due.

Jonathan Scott Miller
Arcata, CA

Since you gave us so much disgusting praise, Jonathan, we don't mind repeating the answer to this frequent question.

Simply put, we can't print game reviews and maintain an appearance of objectivity. While we believe our freelance reviewers were always independent and fair, the very fact that Dragon Magazine *is owned by the largest producer of roleplaying games makes it impossible for many readers to have that same faith in the reviews. Thus, we'll stay out of the business of reviews and concentrate on what most readers agree they like best: Great D&D articles.*

Quit Yer Cryin'!

I have followed the debates over whether 3rd Edition will be friend or foe for quite some time, and after receiving more and more information, I find that there is no need to worry. The magazine has kept us all updated nicely and has done a great job presenting a masterpiece, and it is getting even better as we read.

I had a hard time going from 1st to 2nd Edition because I find things get too complicated for many beginners to actually break into a roleplaying game. But when I went to the Wizards of the Coast website to see how 3rd Edition was coming along, I read everything, and I read it again—and again. For anyone who has doubts, check out the playtesters' comments. I found that the corrections were quite necessary and will definitely add to the gameplay, and I want all the rules *now*.

For anyone still crying over the change, stop it. you probably haven't seen everything about it. Go to the website. It is the D&D game with new clothes and a better sense of identity. Thanks to all the great minds working on the project, and thanks for your almighty protection of our "sacred cows." Everyone else, stop picking on Todd Lockwood. His art doesn't take away from the old feel but definitely adds flavor to an already tasty plate.

Marshall O. Morehouse
Address Withheld

Rattled Cage

Uh-oh, someone's rattled my cage again. Academics who are interested in fantasy and roleplaying need to accustom themselves to reading dogmatic but erroneous statements about topics on which they know a good deal without doing more than uttering a few imprecations. Bruce Beyers does not cite any sources for his account of various Egyptian worthies in issue #269, and he is entitled to his own view of Ramses II, whose "victory" at Kadesh seems to me, following the account in the *Cambridge Ancient History (2nd Edition)*, to have been a lucky escape from disaster. But to say that the Hittites had iron weapons! Where on earth did he get this? The Hittites did *not* use iron weapons. They worked some iron, yes, but the items they made were nonfunctional—mainly statuettes of gods and other ritual items, or daggers that seem to have been prestige items. This much should be clear from any standard work on the Hittites (such as in Gurney or Macqueen).

Further, even if the Hittites did have iron weapons (here steam begins to rise from the ears), it wouldn't have given them any advantage in war because the idea that even the earliest iron weapons were inherently superior to bronze ones is a complete myth. Iron's initial advantages were that it was one metal, instead of the two necessary to make bronze, sources of iron ore were much more common, items made of iron were a bit lighter, and blades of iron could hold an edge longer. If you won't believe me, look at comments in *The Dark Age of Greece* by A. Snodgrass (Edinburgh 1971), chapter five. (Just don't believe the whole chapter, as ideas about the early Iron Age in Greece have moved on.)

I could say more, such as the belief that Ramses III's inscriptions can be unhesitatingly accepted as complete historical truth or that the Ekwesh whom he names as one of the "Sea Peoples" have anything to do with the Achaeans (many readers, but not apparently Bruce Beyers, will know that these are Homer's Greeks), but this letter is long enough already.

Oliver Dickinson
Haxby, U.K.

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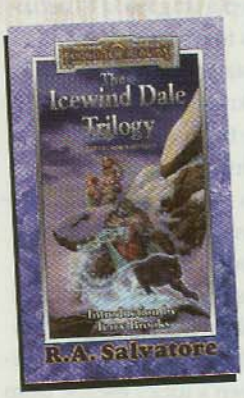

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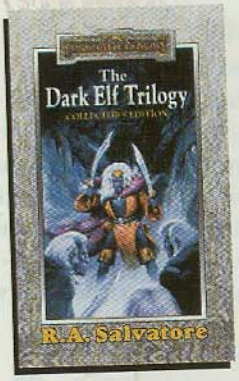

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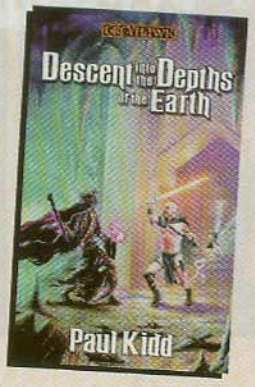

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PAUL KIDD

The intrigues of faery court force the Justicar into the depths of the earth to fight hobgoblins, drow, and other dark enemies in order to save the faery Escalla.

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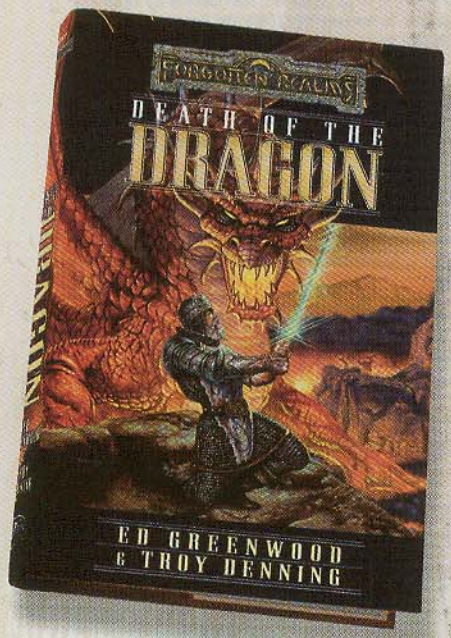

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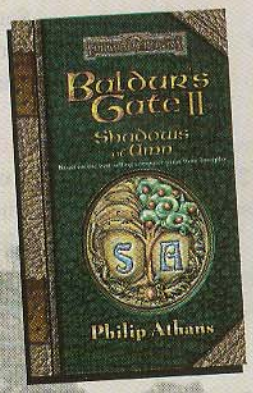

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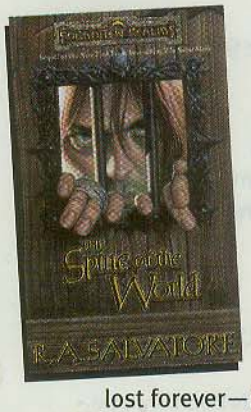

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R. A. SALVATORE

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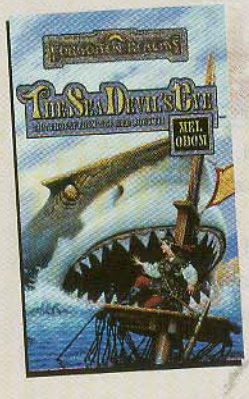

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July 1 ❁
The Sportcentre, Harlow, Essex, UK.
Contact: Jan Eldredge 264
The Dashes Harlow, Essex
CM20 3RZ UK.
Email: uk_games@virgin.net
Website: www.freespace.virgin.net/utopian.tiger/gf.htm

LAIRE-CON
July 7–9 NJ
Camp Sacajewia, NJ.
Contact: Adam Krat.
Email: mayoraloe@aol.com

RuneCon
July 7–9 CT
Howard Johnson's Plainville, CT.
Contact: 400 New Britain Ave
Plainville, CT 06085.
Website: www.runecon.com

ORIGINS
July 13-16 OH
Columbus Conventions Center,
Columbus, OH.
Contact: Wizards of the Coast
P.O.Box 1740
Renton, WA 98057.
Website: www.wizards.com/origins
1-800-529-EXPO

Patriot Games
July 13–16 VA
Holiday Inn Express,
Fredersicksburg, VA.
Contact: David T. Darnell.
Email: David.Darnell@VRPA.org
Website: www.VRPA.org/PatriotGames.html

MIND BLAST Solution:
ESP.

August

GAMEFEST XXI
August 4-13 CA
Game Towne, San Diego, CA.
Contact: Shannon Grove or John Hall
Game Towne
3954 Harney St.
San Diego CA 92110.
Email: gametowne@yahoo.com
Website: www.gametowne.com

GenCon Game Fair
August 10-13 WI
Midwest Express Center,
Milwaukee, WI.
Contact: Wizards of the Coast
P.O.Box 1740
Renton, WA 98057.
Website: www.wizards.com/gencon
1-800-529-EXPO

LAIRE-CON
August 11–13 NJ
Camp Sacajewia, NJ.
Contact: Adam Krat.
Email: mayoraloe@aol.com

BUBONICON 32
August 25-27 NM
Howard Johnson East,
Albuquerque, NM.
Contact: NMSF Conference
P.O. Box 37257
Albuquerque, NM 87176.
Email: cwcraig@nmia.com
Website: www.members.aol.com/bubonicon

September

ConQuest2000
September 1st-4th CA
Clarion Hotel, Millbrae, CA.
Contact: PMB 1422
467 Saratoga Ave
San Jose CA 95129.
Email: info@con-quest.com
Website: www.con-quest.com

RatCon III
September 9 IN
The Auditorium, 4-H Fairgrounds
Lebanon, IN.
Contact: 730 N. Jameson St
Lebanon, IN 4652.
Email: ratcon3@yahoo.com
Website: www.subverbis.com/ratcon.htm

Trinoc-con 2000
Setpember 29-October 1 NC
Durham Marriott & Civic Center,
Durham, NC.
Gaming Guest of Honor: Skip Williams
Contact: Trinoc-con
P.O. Box 10633
Raleigh, NC 27605-0633.
Email: trinoccon@aol.com
Website: www.trinoc-con.org

UNI-CON 2000
November 10–12 MO
Holiday Inn at I-44 and US Hwy 71
Joplin, MO.
Contact: Changing Hands Book Shoppe
528 Virginia Ave
Joplin, MO 64801.
Website: www.unicon-joplin.com

SyndiCon 2000
November 18 & 19 IN
Holiday Inn Express,
Portage, IN.
Contact: Carl Cabanas.
Email: conman1@gte.net
ConMen Syndicate email:
theconmensyndicate@hotmail.com

Convention Calendar Policies

To ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Warning: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," *DRAGON® Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at (425) 204-7254 (U.S.A.).

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✳ Canadian convention
❁ European convention
💻 Online convention

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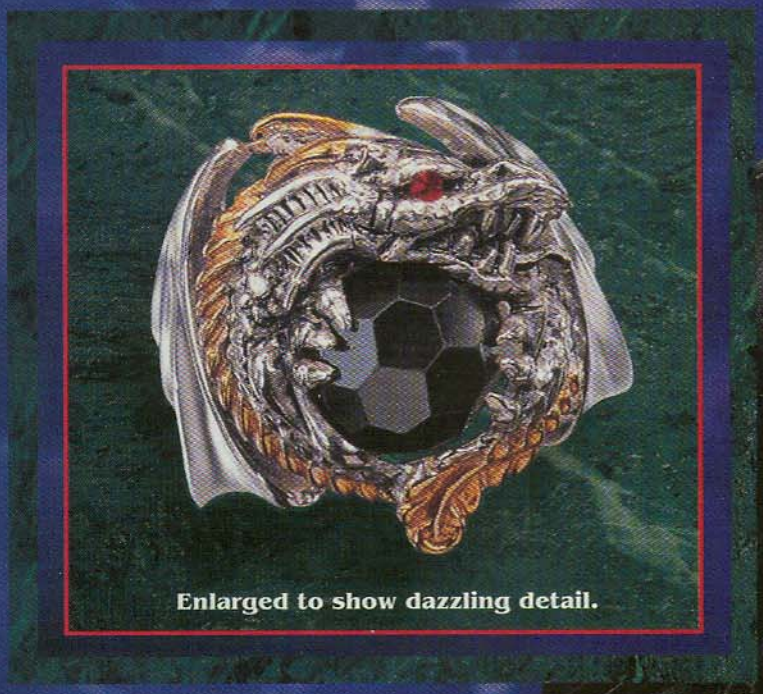

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Question of the Month

Respond to the Question of the Month or any other roleplaying topic by mailing "Forum," DRAGON® magazine, ***1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, USA; dmail@wizards.com.*** Include your full name and mailing address; we won't print a letter sent anonymously. We'll withhold your name or print your full address if you wish.

Besides location-based adventures, what kind of plots work best in your campaign?

Missing the Point

I'm a relatively new AD&D® player, into it for about two years. I started picking up *DRAGON® Magazine* with issue #254 and have been hooked ever since. However, I have recently looked over the "Forum" letters from issues #254 to #269. After analyzing everyone's general complaints about the AD&D game ("this class doesn't match up to this class," "this rule doesn't make any sense," "the game is too far behind others," and so on), I have decided that the vast majority of players are missing the point of the AD&D game and roleplaying games in general, and that the minority are either wrestling with their dislike for certain rules or just giving up and using house rules to adjust the game (and sometimes badly distorting it in the process).

> I urge you weapon enthusiasts out there to let the little things go without making a fuss.

I, too, was once upset over where to lead AD&D, but I calmed down and started thinking about the point of the game, how well it works, and what must be changed. I think a 3rd Edition is in order, but there are other player-based problems as well.

First, many seem to be too wrapped up in the details of their hacks, slashes, and spells rather than fantasy roleplaying. Many players demand realistic weaponry and argue about the history of weapons, their uses, and how effective they were in their time. I, for one, generally use the *Combat & Tactics* guide for its wide range of available weapons and its weapon proficiencies. I do not obsess over whether or not the author's description of certain weapons is accurate, mostly because I do not have time to nit-pick over every detail, and it makes little difference in the end. I urge you weapon enthusiasts out there to let the little things go without making a fuss. Remember that this is a fantasy game and not necessarily historically identical to our own (real) history of warfare.

Other players have just had enough of the magic rules. Among other things, I've heard people say they don't like that whole "memorization" thing, and neither do I. So, after a short brainstorm, I came up with a simple spell-point system that works fairly well. A spellcaster gets 5 spell points per level of experience. A spell costs 2 spell points per spell level to cast. Points are regained at the rate of 10% per day, rounding up. This makes spellcasters better at combat when they need to be and better at everything else when they need to be. The system's only drawback is that it encourages a lack of creativity by the wizard. (Why use an indirect form of attack, such as Enchantment/Charm, when you could just rain *fireball* after *fireball* on the bad guys?) But this hasn't been much of a problem for my group, whose wizards enjoy being inventive.

More players than ever whine about the uselessness of the rogue classes. While the thief was in need of improvement and can be improved with help from certain *DRAGON Magazine* articles, players too often expect their rogue to be a toe-to-toe combatant like the warrior, and they are disappointed when their lack of muscle leads to the rogue's demise. Tricking big, stupid monsters into playing into the party's hands is also within the rogue's area of expertise, and doing so offers the rogue player a fine roleplaying experience.

This leads us to the final problem: the fact that many players don't understand roleplaying. There's more to the AD&D game than bashing down dungeon gates and slaying evil beasts. Play a video game if that's your thing. The AD&D game is also about interaction with a fantasy world environment. Thus, I encourage DMs and players alike to widen their gaming horizons and expand their fantasy universes. There's little that can be more fun than a good D&D® game.

Concerning rule changes that should come about with the 3rd Edition, my major pet peeve is that I think a point-based character creation system (as in *Skills & Powers*) is generally better than the template system where every player is basically playing a pre-made character. With a point-based system, not only are the choices far greater for unique characters, but the characters in a party can all be equal. That's why I'd like players to be able to set their own ability scores. That way, instead of relying on lucky die rolls, characters could create the exact kind of character they want on a point-based ability system. This also makes every character just as good as the other. The only bad thing about a point-based ability system is that most players will pump up their prime requisites and leave less important stuff out,

so fighters are good only at fighting, wizards can only cast spells, and so on. The answer is to make every ability just as good as the other, so that players will have to think twice before they dump everything into one ability and ignore Charisma, for instance.

Bryan Rantala
Grand Marais, MN

Online Gaming Resources

As we all know, the Internet has provided roleplaying gamers with a wonderful venue to exchange stories, discuss rules, and socialize through online gaming. The companies that produce games offer tips, product information, and even downloads for their fans. The Wizards of the Coast® website contains numerous articles to download, all for free. There you can find the DRAGON FIST™ game, a complete roleplaying game designed with a variant rules version of the D&D system to create the stunts seen in Kung Fu movies. A great many gamers either overlook or are unaware of vast amounts of painstakingly compiled information offered for free by gamers in the form of "netbooks."

A simple search engine query with the word "netbook" in the subject will reveal dozens of links to the D&D game and other gaming oriented webpages. The netbooks are free to download, and while some are downright silly, others can be extremely useful as repositories for house rules, new spells and magical items, equipment lists, lists of herbs and their uses, traps, campaign settings, and on and on. One, entitled "Unearthed Arcania," even contains a foreword by Gary Gygax himself! What greater endorsement can there be?

I have read and downloaded many D&D netbooks and found (at least some) information in each that can be dropped into a campaign with no trouble. I run a *Skills & Powers* campaign, and the *Skills & Powers Psionic Netbook* was a boon to my game.

Gamers love the Internet, and if you've not discovered the array of netbooks available, I suggest you do so. You might be pleasantly surprised!

C. Roach
deaconblue@hotmail.com

Reading It First

To all the gamers complaining about the 3rd Edition, I say, give it a chance. Wait until you can actually read the rules as a whole before you make a decision.

Most of the complaints I hear are from people who are basing their decision on the preview articles in *DRAGON Magazine* and rumors from the Web. I, and members of my gaming group, look forward with great anticipation to 3rd Edition. I've been playing since 1st Edition and welcomed the release of the 2nd Edition which was created because 1st Edition got too big. Well, 2nd Edition is even larger and needs to be cleaned up.

I know there will be some who will continue to play 2nd Edition after 3rd Edition is released, and that's fine. To each his (or her) own. But I will look at 3rd Edition before I complain or make any decision not to play.

Steven Damon
Meriden, CT

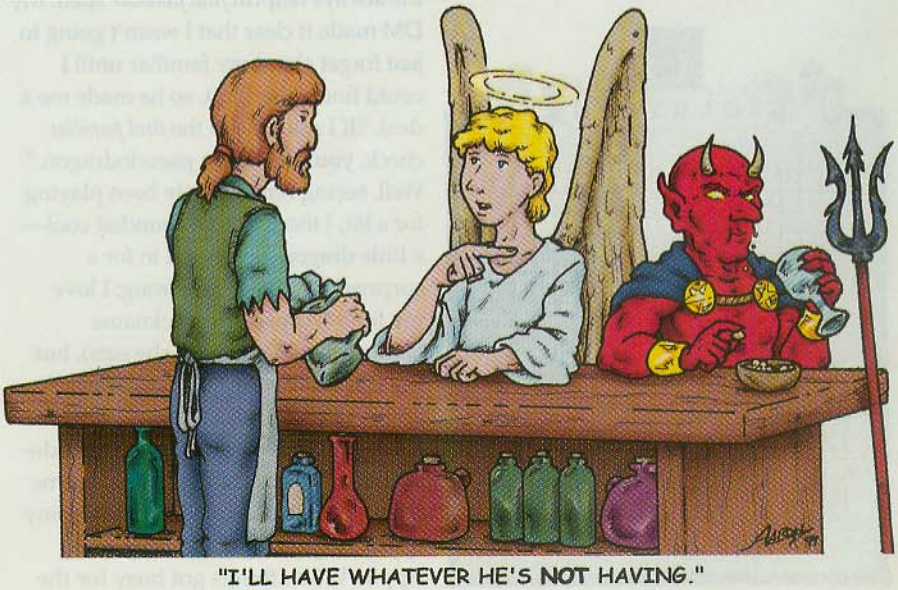
Dark GREYHAWK

I wrote this in response to the "Question of the Month" and also to add to the discussion in #264 through #270 about evil characters.

The campaign I run is set in the northwest of the GREYHAWK® campaign setting and uses heavy AL-QADIM® sources. The Arabic feel is very refreshing. All the characters are foreigners and have had a wonderful time trying to blend in by learning new customs, dress, and especially language. They have adopted new names and even acquired their hirelings from this area. New and exotic locales always liven a static campaign. The land is full of mystery and intrigue, but the PCs fit in perfectly because they are all schemers and shady fellows as well. They always parlay or even deal with villians rather than just outright slay them. Every monster or encounter is assessed for its benefit, not just used as a stepping stone for the next encounter. Their motto is, dealing with evil is better than a pat on the back. Then, if necessary, you can always turn on evil and side with good in the end.

In fantasy literature, the greatest heroes are what I term "shady."

I do not rigidly control alignments, except in the case of priests. All the characters are decidedly shady but not evil. As long as the PCs can at least trust one another, then it doesn't matter what their alignments are. The lawful evil fighter in my group has shown many instances of paladinlike behavior toward the common man and even



"I'LL HAVE WHATEVER HE'S NOT HAVING."

By Aaron Williams

his foes. You don't wear alignment like a badge; your actions define your character.

In fantasy literature, the greatest heroes are what I term "shady." Elric, Conan, Fafhrd, and the Grey Mouser are all shady characters. Alignment never stopped any of them from doing the right thing in the end. The only recent characters from literature I can imagine fitting this description are Raistlin or Drizzt. Why are the shady ones the favorites? They have more fun.

It seems to me the only classes purely concerned with their alignment are the religious ones (cleric, druid, and paladin). They are the ones who have their beliefs dictated by a higher power. I am not saying you shouldn't play good guys, but some campaigns could use a change in locale and attitude.

Michael Bridges
Jerseyville, IL

Well-Aged Articles

I've been reading *DRAGON Magazine* since issue #35, and I've noticed one constant in the last twenty or so "D-Mail" columns. Every issue there is one letter from someone who says that he can't use some article and asks why it was included in the magazine. Guess what, people: You aren't the only ones reading this magazine. Someone will use the information at some time in the future. I've used articles from 4–5 years ago in my current campaign, be it about spells,magical items, or races. I'm running a halfling adventure in which the party's enemy is a wereweasel mage and his minions. I used the weasel hengeyokai as a template and the weremagic article from issue #266 as a guideline.

The relationship of priest to deity is similar to that of child to parent.

So if you can't use an article this week, save it till next month, next year or next decade. Like fine wine, *DRAGON Magazine* articles get better with age.

Issue #270 is a good one, but if fiends show up in my game, my wife told me that I'd better have Piffany's *duct tape of healing* handy.

Mike Donavon
El Dorado, AR

Familiar Tales

I'm writing in response to the "Wyrm's Turn" in *DRAGON Magazine* #269. I've been in several campaigns in which the lowly animal companions are often used as retrievers, and the players often forget that they are even there. But in the first campaign I was ever in, I had a very interesting animal companion. My first character was an elven mage, and after a few adventures she came upon the always helpful *find familiar* spell. My DM made it clear that I wasn't going to just forget about my familiar until I could find a use for it, so he made me a deal. "If I roll a 20 on the *find familiar* check, you can have a pseudodragon." Well, seeing how I'd only been playing for a bit, I thought that sounded cool—a little dragon. Boy, was I in for a surprise! Don't get me wrong; I love my little "Apple" (her nickname because of all the apples she eats), but my DM made sure I didn't get away with anything.

My DM, in the guise of my pseudodragon, was constantly harassing me about gems, gold coins, and big shiny apples, especially if I was ignoring Apple. When things got busy for the DM, he would pawn her off on other players. It soon became quite an event to see who could wheedle the most stuff away from my mage via my familiar. She was also apt to pick peoples' pockets if my mage wasn't watching. If my mage wanted something done by Apple, it cost a lot of gems and pretty coins. After a while, everyone was playing her so often that my DM gave her a character class (thief), and my mage had to keep an even closer eye on her.

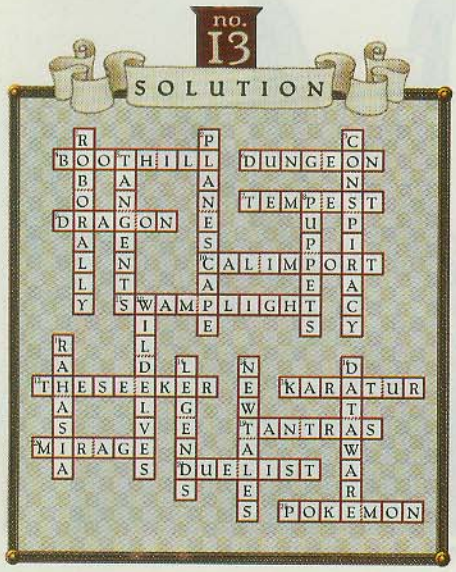
Though none of our current animal companions are as outstanding as Apple, those of us in the group who now DM use her as a model, often reminding a player that his or her animal companion is also a part of the character. Cats who aren't fed regularly tend to wander off and growl a lot when asked to do stuff, hawks tend to drop important messages when not well cared for and fed. Even horses tend to send their riders sailing if not cared for properly or rode to exertion.

Heather Woodhurst
Roseburg, OR

Faith Hurts

In "Forum" from issue #269, Gregory Rick writes that there is no earthly reason for clerics to need to memorize their spells ahead of time, and that this is "little more than a pale copy of the wizard requirement." He goes on to purport that priestly magic draws its energy from a sentient force with which there is an implied agreement or outright bargain," thus implying that to fulfill the spirit of this agreement, the god is required to give his aid at the very moment the priest needs it and in the form the priest requires. I have heard this argument many times and have even known gamers who have used such a system of priests being able to determine which spell to use at the moment of casting, and I cannot disagree more.

Matters of faith (even imaginary ones in roleplaying games) cannot be reduced to a mere bargain between two sentient beings. While a god is more than willing to aid a loyal follower, I think it's hubris to think that a god would be obligated to form and focus his divine might at the whim of



a mere mortal, no matter how pious. However, if you want to keep the exchange in bargain form, it is part of the conditions of the agreement that the cleric have enough forethought to determine what spells and powers he might need ahead of time, as well as the wisdom to use those spells to the best of his ability when situations he could not foresee occur.

A friend of mine makes the following argument: If a priest were on his way to bless the a community's crops, and he had prayed for *bless*, *sanctify*, and similar spells but was assaulted by ankhegs along the way, would it make sense for his god to forsake him and not grant him a *flame strike* when he needs it? My answer is, yes. Priests are expected to be wise and exercise forethought. They are also expected to accept the will of their gods, and if that means having to run away from or be eaten by ankhegs, then so be it. The argument that priests should be able to cast any spell they want when they need to is tantamount to those in real life who argue that, if there is a god, why does he let bad things happen? Gods offer the powerful tool of faith, and one must do with it what one can using his or her own abilities. Thankfully, in fantasy worlds, the power of faith comes in the form of spells granted by a deity. Now the deity is expected to cast the spell *for* you?

The relationship of priest to deity is similar to that of child to parent. A parent might be able to give her child whatever he wants whenever he wants it, but that is not the job of a parent. The job of a parent is to do her best to give her child the tools to overcome his problems to the best of his own ability. This is a measure of growth and maturity. Similarly, a priest who can overcome problems using the tools her god grants her, but with her own fore-thought and reason, guided by the moral and behavioral code instilled in her by her god, is experiencing spiritual growth and maturity. She is making her god proud. She is proving herself worthy of the favor and trust she's been shown. In terms of game mechanics, priest spells are already differentiated from wizardly ones in terms of choice, style, power, and organization.

As for switching out prepared spells for healing spells (as the 3rd Edition will allow priests to do), I believe such an ability makes the priest much more the combat medic that people hate having to play. While such an ability might be allowed in the case of certain specialty priests for certain types of spells (for example a priest of a god of war could switch out spells for spells from the combat or war spheres), the general allowance of this could only lead to abuse of the rule and a decline in players displaying cleverness and ingenuity in the use of the spells they have to work with. That, in my humble opinion, would be a decline in the quality of gaming.

Osvaldo Ortega
Brooklyn, NY

Larry Smith

by Stephen Kenson

"Don't let your sense of adventure end at the gaming table," advises Larry Smith.

Alignment?
Chaotic good. I'm reliable as all hell, until I decide not to be anymore.

Favorite movie?
Young Frankenstein.

Favorite book?
Blue Highways by William Least Heat Moon.

Album?
The first Crosby, Stills, and Nash Album. A perfect piece of work.

Favorite D&D® class?
Elven thief. I've played that one many times.

Monster?
Mind flayers. They just look cool. I used mind flayers every chance I could get.

If you could have dinner with any celebrity, who would it be?
Mark Twain. I think he would be fascinating over dinner.

If you could have one superpower, which would you choose?
I think flight would be the most fascinating. Not the most practical, but certainly the most fun.

Who's the most entertaining DM you've ever played with?
Chris Perkins. As well as being one of the most entertaining people I've ever met.

Favorite artist?
Maxfield Parish.

Major influences?
Parish, certainly. Some of the early British airbrush artists.

He's been the Art Director for *DRAGON® Magazine* for ten years, designed over a hundred issues of *DRAGON*, along with *DUNGEON®*, *POLYHEDRON®*, and *AMAZING®* magazines. He's seen TSR go from laying out magazines on light tables and paste-up boards to computers, and from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin to Renton, Washington. But after ten years with the magazine, Larry Smith is retiring—at least for a while.

"You never know," he says with a chuckle, "I might come back and call up human resources, looking for my old job back. Or I might decide to go down to New Mexico and sell lattes to the Indians. Who knows?"

For now Larry, who just turned 50, plans to spend a few months camping across the country with his girlfriend, Arlene. He says it was a difficult decision to leave the job and the magazine he loved so much, but it was time for him to move on to new things.

"Plus, I want to get out there and enjoy myself without a monthly deadline looming overhead."

Crayons to Computers

Born in New Jersey, Smith knew he wanted to be an artist from an early age. He began taking art and music lessons at age 7. "My dad was a musician, and he decided we were all going to be musicians," he says. "I got a guitar, and my brother and I played together in bands for years." But Larry found art more reliable and easier to get into. "My next-door neighbor was a fine artist who painted. She was sort of a mentor for me."

After auditing some college-level art courses in high school, Larry went on to attend the Rochester Technical Institute in New York, graduating in 1971 with a BFA in illustration. He then spent over fifteen years working in New York as an illustrator in the advertising and marketing field before growing tired of the business and looking for a new direction in life. He bought a small hotel in Wisconsin and began the process of renovating it and having it placed on the national register of historic places, looking forward to life as an innkeeper. Becoming art director of a gaming magazine was the farthest thing from his mind at that point.

"I played the D&D® game back then," Larry says, "and I knew TSR was nearby in Lake Geneva." After two years of working on renovations to get his hotel into shape, Larry found himself missing the art business and looking for something else to do. So he went down to TSR's offices in Lake Geneva and spoke with then-editor Roger Moore. Shortly thereafter, he was hired as the new Art Director of TSR Periodicals on the strength of his resume.

"I figured I would just do it for a couple years," says Larry. "Suddenly, it's ten years later."

The Great Nipple Ban

Larry knew things were going to be interesting when, while working on his first issue of *DRAGON Magazine* (#157, May 1990), management decided at the 11th hour to pull the planned content and make the issue an "all Buck Rogers issue" to promote the company's new line of BUCK ROGERS® roleplaying and board games. "We were scrambling to get art together for that issue, do a new layout, and get everything to the printers on time. I thought to myself, 'Is this how things around here are going to be all the time?'"

After ten years on the job, Larry Smith is going camping.

Fortunately, things did calm down (mostly), but Larry has many recollections of the ups and downs of TSR during his tenure. Being involved with the periodicals afforded him a unique perspective, somewhat "outside" the regular business of the company.

For example, there was what Larry calls the "great nipple ban" period of TSR. Then-President of TSR Lorraine Williams wanted to "clean up" TSR's image in "what we called 'the Disney of roleplaying' theory," Larry explains. With many dark-themed RPGs like FASA's SHADOWRUN and White Wolf's VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE appearing in the late '80s and early '90s, TSR made an effort to be seen as a maker of games that were safe and suited for younger players. Thus, among other things, came the nipple ban.

"We couldn't show nipples, male or female," Larry says. "We could show women with breasts that defied gravity, but we couldn't show nipples. About the time it crested there was a cover illustration with a male mummy—I think it was an rk post painting. The bandages were coming off, and—my god—he had a nipple showing!"

Another example concerned an article about how to raise money for your gaming group. Larry wanted to make it clear the article was talking about real money, not gold pieces, so he copied the eye-in-the-pyramid symbol from the back of a one dollar bill as part of the artwork. "I got a call from the legal department later. They were upset that I used such an obviously 'satanic' symbol in a *DRAGON Magazine* article. I had to explain to them how I got it from a regular dollar bill!" Then there was the time an April Fools' issue featured "magic tape," including a Scotch Tape package. "The legal department pitched a fit over that, thinking we'd get sued by 3M."

Watching It All

Larry was witness to other important events in TSR's history, such as the time when Creative Director Jim Ward came up with an idea for a card game based on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. "We were sitting in a concept meeting, and Jim was pitching this idea he had for a trading card game. The VPs at the time looked at him and said it was the dumbest idea they'd ever heard. (The game sounded like Old Maid for the D&D game.) But Jim wanted to test it out, so we ran some prototype cards in the magazine. They've since become collector's items and the overrun sheets of the cards are still selling at conventions like the GEN CON® Game Fair." Of course, not long afterward, Wizards of the Coast introduced a new little fad called the MAGIC: THE GATHERING® trading card game. Later, TSR called on Jim Ward to dust off this idea, which became the SPELLFIRE® card game.

Over his tenure, Larry watched artists he worked with grow and improve. "John Stanko was in high school when he started doing cartoons and spot illos for me. Now, he's married and doing Web design and illustration. Shortly after I started, Brom was hired on staff. He's gone through numerous style changes over the years that I've worked with him. It's been great to have been a part of working with all the great artists TSR and Wizards have seen."

Finally, after ten years of monthly deadlines, Larry was ready to try something new, like when he bought that hotel in Wisconsin. "It was becoming less of a passion for me. I used to take the magazine home over the weekend and pore over the boards. The requirements of meeting a monthly deadline impose themselves on other parts of your life, things I wanted to concentrate more on."

Still, it was a difficult decision to leave the job and the magazine he loved so much—particularly the people he worked with. "One of the great things about working in the gaming industry," Larry says, "is people come from all walks of life, so you get this great influx of ideas. It's one of the things keeping the industry vital. Bruce Heard, once a Creative Director and Director of Production Planning, worked for a French hotel, for example, and someone at TSR once contemplated becoming a pro wrestler. Everyone's happy to be here because it's what they really want to do."

"EVERYONE'S HAPPY TO BE HERE BECAUSE IT'S WHAT THEY REALLY WANT TO DO."

What Larry really wants to do for now is spend time with his girlfriend, enjoy the outdoors, get some exercise, quit smoking, finish setting up his home studio (which is still mostly in boxes since the move out to the Renton area), and possibly take up freelance illustration again. He might even find time to play a game or two.

After that, who knows? "I might get bored and decide to get back into the art game in one way or another. I'm sure Wizards hasn't seen the last of me."

D&D: The Next Generation

By Gary Gygax

No, this essay doesn't deal with the 3rd Edition D&D® game, although it might logically do so with the title I have selected. Instead it is about the aging of the roleplaying games audience, and why it should worry us.

As I stated in last month's column, the survival of the roleplaying game as a viable form of entertainment is at stake. To remain a vital form, the roleplaying game must constantly attract new participants. Over the past decade it has not managed to do so very effectively. Those of you who have been active in gaming can note this rather easily. Just look around you when you're at a gaming convention. Are there lots of young gamers? Or are the ones you see mostly older, perhaps very familiar faces? The answer is disturbing. We are not attracting nearly as many youngsters as we once did.

Some of this can be attributed to the lure of trading card games, but TCGs do not bear all the blame. Publishers must accept a fair share of the burden too. Current offerings of roleplaying games seem to be ever more complex, their target audience clearly not the young person but the older roleplaying buff. Which publishers are currently making an effort to attract new players with games aimed at the neophyte? There might be some out there, but if so I, for one, can't name their titles.

The grognards of roleplaying deride youngsters, call them munchkins, are vocal in their disparagement of hack-and-slash play and dungeon crawls. This is, in point of fact, hostility toward young persons entering the ranks. It is plainly evident to newcomers that they are viewed as virtual pariahs and inferiors if they pursue the game form as they wish to. Now think back—especially those Gentle Readers with a fair number of years of play to their credit.

When you began gaming, were you a tad on the "munchkin" side? Did you greatly enjoy hack-and-slash play and dungeon adventuring? The majority of young neophytes pretty well fit that mold. With experience comes a degree of sophistication and a desire to enjoy other facets of the game form. Thus the emphasis of many campaigns switches gradually from the dungeon to the whole of the fantasy environment, from combat to character conversations to the politics and economics of the fantasy milieu. Were you then somehow wrong or inferior when you enjoyed the more action-oriented aspects of the game? Of course not. These facets were, are clearly still, those that appeal most to prospective players and new enthusiasts—and not just those of tender years.

When you began gaming, were you a tad on the "munchkin" side?

The aging of the roleplaying game audience must be reversed, or in time the game form will be essentially extinct. This can be accomplished in part through a more hospitable atmosphere in all places young players will come to learn about and engage in game activity. We must make them welcome and look upon them fondly (even if we would just now rather not have them as DMs or fellow players in a tournament). These social considerations are a must, but they don't treat the root cause of the problem.

To again attract young people to roleplaying games, publishers must step up to the plate. There is a crying need for good roleplaying game offerings that don't cater to the jaded habitue, have rules that make the IRS tax codes look easy, and demand theatrics from new players who are inexperienced in such histrionic exertions and find them uncomfortable.

What interests young gamers is ease of entry, so the rules need to be uncomplicated. Plenty of action for the new character is a must, or else boredom will set in and turn the newcomer away; thus, initial adventures need to have combat. Some spectacle is helpful, so painted miniatures are a plus. Finally, most young players can't properly handle the finer points of roleplaying, so they should not be subjected perforce to the stress of attempting theatrics to any great degree.

There is, I believe, going to be an introductory version of the 3rd Edition D&D game. Let us all hope fervently that this offering will be just the thing needed to bring a veritable flood of fresh young faces to gaming tables and conventions. The aggravation caused by this to us veterans is well worth it. That said, I suppose this column is about the new version of the D&D® game after all, for I think that an introductory version of that RPG is the main hope for bringing us the next generation.

Next month is a surprise! No hints.

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COUNTDOWN

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Sorcerers and Bards

To be perfectly honest, the sorcerer seemed like a terrible idea when we saw the first draft of the new *Player's Handbook*. Why would anyone want to play a wizard if a sorcerer can cast more spells per level per day and lags only a level behind in gaining higher-level spells? In the months of playtesting that followed, we realized that sorcerers aren't better than wizards after all.

They're just a lot cooler.

A Different Magic

Since the D&D magic system has always been a source of hot debate in "Forum" letters, it's no surprise that 3rd Edition offers players a choice of magic systems. For players who prefer not to pick their spells ahead of time, the sorcerer is a great alternative to the wizard.

Play a Sorcerer ...

- To get rid of that pesky spellbook
- If Charisma's your favorite ability
- To cast more spells per day than a wizard
- To gain a familiar at 1st level
- To cast the spell you want when you want

Blood of Dragons

Unlike wizards, sorcerers are born rather than made. No amount of poring over dusty old tomes can make you a sorcerer if the magic isn't already in your blood.

The source of this power is a matter of debate, but some whisper that sorcerers are the descendants of dragons, who long ago took humanoid form and humanoid lovers.

Whatever the reason, since a sorcerer's power comes from within, they don't need to prepare spells in advance by studying some dusty tome. Instead, a sorcerer chooses which spell to cast only when she's ready to let it fly. Thus, a sorcerer who knows the *feather fall* spell won't be squished in that unexpected fall, while the wizard would need the foresight to prepare that spell to avoid a messy end.

She's Got Personality

Because a sorcerer's power comes from within, she gains bonus spells based on Charisma rather than Intelligence. Intelligence is also important, if for no other reason then because most of a sorcerer's class skills depend on that ability. For determining what level spells a sorcerer can cast, as well as to determine a target's saving throw to resist the sorcerer's spell, Charisma is still the most important ability.

Firepower Galore

Another obvious advantage to playing a sorcerer rather than a wizard is that you can cast more spells each day. At first level, a sorcerer can cast up to five cantrips and three 1st-level spells, not counting bonus spells. In comparison, a 1st-level wizard can cast only three cantrips and one 1st-level spell. Even at 6th level, when sorcerers gain their first 3rd-level spell, they can cast up to three per day, and possibly more depending on their Charisma bonuses. With *fireball* as an obvious choice for many players, you can understand why our playtest group refers to sorcerers as "battlemages."

One less obvious advantage is that sorcerers can use a higher-level spell slot to cast a lower-level spell. It might seem disappointing to use a 3rd-level slot to cast that *knock* spell when you've used all your 2nd-level slots, but you'll get the door open.

Aye, There's the Rub

Wizards still have a few advantages over sorcerers, including a much broader spell repertoire. While wizards begin the game with all cantrips and at least three 1st-level spells of their choice, sorcerers begin with only four cantrips and two first-level spells. Furthermore, sorcerers learn relatively few new spells as they advance in level, while wizards not only learn new spells automatically but can copy those they find on scrolls and other sources into their own spellbooks.

The bottom line: Play a wizard if you want a broad variety of spells and abilities, but for a versatile spellcaster with plenty of ammo, choose a sorcerer.

Silver-Tongued Devils

Sorcerers aren't the only arcane spellcasters who have broken free of the chains of spellbooks. In the new D&D game, bards also power their spells from within. Rather than calling on the legacy of dragons for their power, however, bards summon magic from music, song, and their own souls.

Meet the New Bard

The new bard works a lot like the old bard. With access to arcane spells, more skills than any class other than the rogue, and a long list of class skills, your bard is sure to be different from everyone else's. Independent by nature (and nonlawful by the rules), bards are nothing if not individuals.

Like sorcerers, bards depend most on Charisma. A bard with a high Charisma can cast more powerful spells, more spells per day, and spells that are harder to resist. Charisma is also crucial to making successful Perform skill checks, the basis for most of the bard's class abilities.

The quintessential generalist, the bard can't neglect any ability score, but Intelligence and Dexterity are probably the most important after Charisma, not only for Armor Class and skill-point bonuses, but also for good scores in the bard's many class skills.

Spellsingers

Since they aren't dedicated to magic the way a wizard or sorcerer is, they can eventually cast spells of only 6th level or lower, and they choose from a different list from that of wizards and sorcerers.

Like sorcerers, bards needn't prepare them ahead of time. Also like sorcerers, bards know relatively few spells but gain bonus spells for high Charisma. In fact, bards with a Charisma bonus can cast spells of certain level sooner than their less charismatic associates. Thus, you'll see a "0" rather than a "—" in some places on the bard's Spells per Day chart, indicating that a bard gains only bonus spells of that level.

Music Hath Charms ...

Bardic magic might begin with spellcasting, but it sure doesn't end there. A bard can perform the following magical effects, all based on the Perform skill. More powerful abilities require a higher number of ranks in the skill.

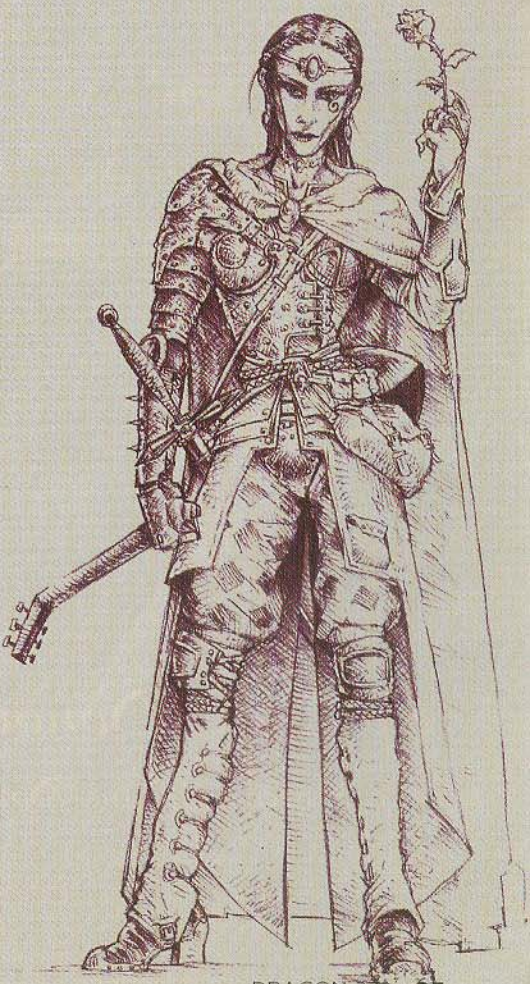
- The inspire courage ability bolsters allies against fear and charm effects and grants a +1 morale bonus to attack and weapon damage rolls. Requires 3 ranks in Perform.
- A bard's countersong allows creatures affected by a sound-based magical attack to use the bard's Perform check result in place of their own saving throws. Requires 3 ranks in Perform.
- *Fascinate*, requiring 3 ranks in Perform, can capture the attention of a creature for up to 1 round per level of the bard. Once a creature is *fascinated*, a bard with 9 or more ranks in Perform can attempt to make a *suggestion*, as the spell.
- Inspire competence grants an ally a +2 competence bonus on a particular skill check for up to 2 minutes. Requires 6 ranks in Perform.
- The inspire greatness ability actually grants additional Hit Dice, a +2 competence bonus on attacks, and a +1 competence bonus on Fortitude saving throw. Requires 12 ranks in Perform.

A Little Knowledge ...

Some say that bardic knowledge is the cornerstone of the class's special abilities, and that's where a good Intelligence comes to the fore. On a successful check (1d20 + the bard's level + Intelligence bonus), a bard can come up with information on an area, an individual's reputation, or even the general purpose of a magic item. The better the roll on the bardic knowledge check, of course, the better the result. For commonly known information, a bard might need to beat a Difficulty Class (DC) of only 10; for truly obscure information, he might need to beat DC 30.

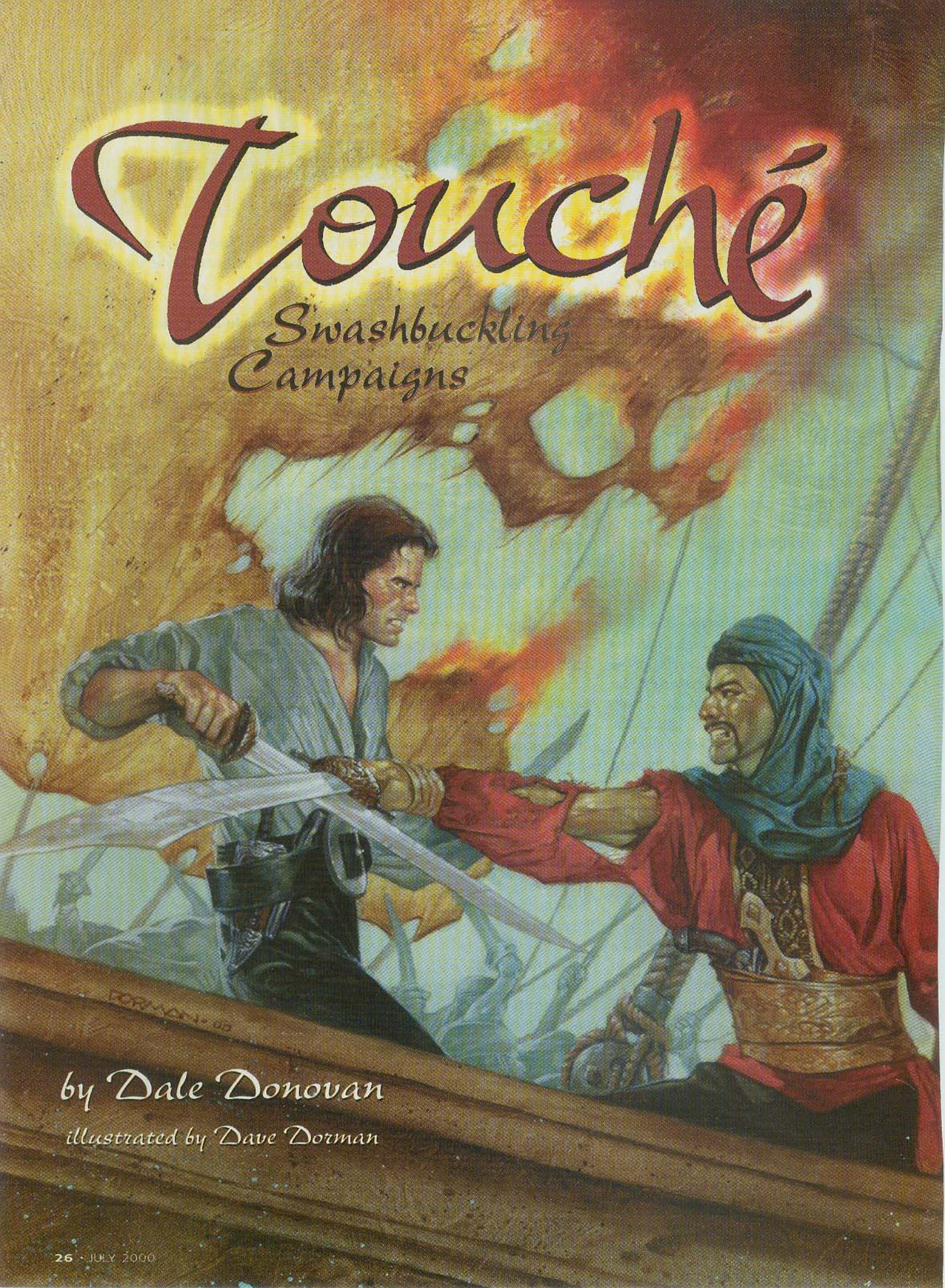
Next month: The waiting is over, and the new D&D game is here at last! Join us in 30 days for a special 3rd Edition Spectacular, including:

- The secrets of the d20 system
- How the playtesting worked
- A complete mini-campaign
- How to create a prestige class
- A CD-ROM including a robust demo of the character generator, the complete *3rd Edition Conversion Manual*, an exclusive *DUNGEON® Adventures* module, and trailers of the hottest D&D computer games coming in the next year



Touché

Swashbuckling Campaigns



by Dale Donovan

illustrated by Dave Dorman

Caine passed among knots of fighting men, his scimitar ready. His corsairs were already close to winning this fight. Without a mage or a champion to match the giant Cornelius, these slavers were easy pickings.

Caine's steel-blue eyes searched for the slave-ship's captain. "He's in one of three places," thought Caine. "In the middle of one of these brawls, supervising the fight from the aft, or cowering in the hold." Cain considered the latter option and realized he'd never be so lucky, so he moved toward the cog's aft-castle. He'd find the captain there or use the view to spot him.

Caine found the Calishite waiting for him. Rysal Ben ibn Haydah and Caine had crossed blades twice before, once aboard ship in a savage winter storm, and once in a back alley in Schamedar.

"So my eyes confirm what my nose has told me. If there's a stench of slavery fouling a fine sea breeze, Ben ibn Haydah cannot be far off. Where did you gather this pack of unfortunates, and for whom? The Zhentil? The Rundeen? The Twisted Rune perhaps?"

"Remain overlong, pirate, and you'll learn to your regret for whom I toil this day," replied Haydah, an olive-skinned man much larger and broader than Caine. Haydah raised his short, heavy cutlass to meet his foe . . .

Since the D&D® game was created, DMs have struggled with the problem of how to create and maintain a sense of derring-do, and panache in roleplaying game campaigns. While swashbuckling is in vogue again, the challenge of running a swashbuckling game remains. At last, here are the secrets of running a successful swashbuckling campaign for the AD&D® game.

Characters

The heart and soul of any roleplaying game is its player characters (PCs). If the characters—and their players—aren't equal to a swashbuckling campaign, the DM's job is infinitely harder. Players who are limited to only the hack-and-slash mentality create PCs who are similarly limited. But if the DM is blessed with fans of the genre, good roleplayers, or simply players who are willing to trust the DM to try something different, then the first obstacle is overcome.

Agents & Outlaws

Of these two basic types of swashbucklers, agents are the most obvious choice for player characters. Agents are those characters who work for some secular or religious authority. Dumas' famous musketeers are in the service of the king and queen of France, operating against the wicked Cardinal Richelieu. Privateers such as the English Sea Dogs work for one government against others. In the worlds of the D&D game, similar groups exist with which the PCs can become affiliated.

The Harpers of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign qualify as such a group, as do the Purple Dragons of Cormyr (and their naval counterparts, the Blue Dragons). Many of the knightly orders aligned with various churches and the agents of Tethyr's new royal government also qualify for inclusion in this category. In the GREYHAWK® setting, PCs could be members of the City of Greyhawk militia or constabulary, or agents of any of a number of governments working to contain the evil of Iuz or the Scarlet Brotherhood. In the BIRTHRIGHT® campaign, the region known as Roesone alone hosts many local and regional secular and religious groups that the PCs can work with against opposing (or heretical) factions, not to mention combating the evils of the awnsheghlien.

Outlaws are those who, for whatever reason, work outside the bounds of accepted society. Robin Hood, Zorro, and the archetypal pirates on the high seas all fit this bill. In the worlds of the D&D game, swashbuckling PCs can follow this route as well.

In Faerûn, PCs can work with Randal Morn's forces in the Dalelands, fight Teldorn Darkhope's occupation of Mintar and Kzelter, or ply piracy on the Sea of Fallen Stars, the Lake of Steam, or along the Sword Coast. PCs who choose to work with the Harpers might find that different organizations consider them to be outlaws, as Harper agendas sometimes conflict with those of other authorities.

In the GREYHAWK campaign, the Circle of Eight most certainly has covert agents or spies working for it all over the Flanaess. Additionally, many of the coastal or island powers have to deal with (or employ) pirates, and numerous bandits prey upon travelers in what was once the Great Kingdom.

The PCs of the BIRTHRIGHT setting could be working to foment rebellion among the peasants who live in the tyrannical grip of an awnshegh. They might also strive to wrest control of mebhaighl (ley lines of magical power) or contested lands away from an enemy.

Roles

A swashbuckling campaign allows PCs to assume a variety of roles regardless of character class or kit. With a little ingenuity, any character can fit these roles. Consider the role of diplomat: It is easy to see mages, bards, priests, and even

Recommended Reading

Fiction

Since the "swashbuckling era" is an invention of storytellers, fiction is often preferable to nonfiction in evoking the swashbuckling atmosphere and style. Here is a selected list of both classic and modern examples of swashbuckling fiction.

Brust, Steven. *The Phoenix Guards.* This Dumas pastiche has our hero and his three companions entrenched in dangerous imperial politics in an effort to save the empire. Its sequel is *Five Hundred Years After.*

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe.* This story is based on the real-life marooning and rescue of pirate Alexander Selkirk.

Dumas, Alexandre. *The Count of Monte Cristo.* This is the tale of a dashing young sailor accused of treason, his imprisonment, escape, and all the adventures that follow.

Dumas, Alexandre. *The Three Musketeers.* The classic tale we all know through the various films. Read the book, even though you might be familiar with the basic plot.

Four more titles continue this series. In order, they are: *Twenty Years After, The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Louise de la Valliere,* and *The Man in the Iron Mask.* Also look for more of his works, including *The Corsican Brothers, The Black Tulip,* and *Camille.*

Forester, C.S. The Hornblower Series. These stories are Napoleonic swashbuckling at its best. In 1999, The A&E cable channel filmed and broadcast four of these stories.

Fraser, George MacDonald. *The Pyrates.* The author of the wonderful Flashman books turns his wit to the pirate genre in this romp.

Goldman, William. *The Princess Bride.* A wonderful, light-hearted story that inspired the film of the same name.

McCulley, Johston. *The Mark of Zorro.* The collected story of the serialized tale of California's freedom fighter set in 1820. This man in black is both the first modern-era swashbuckler and the first modern hero to maintain two identities, one public, one secret.

Kushner, Ellen. *Swordspoint: A Melodrama of Manners.* This is a rousing tale of adventure, intrigue, and high society in a Renaissance-feeling fantasy setting.

Orczy, Baroness. *The Scarlet Pimpernel.* The tale of an English nobleman who lives a double life in order to rescue French aristocrats from "Madame Guillotine" during the French Revolution. This book has *nine* sequels.

Powers, Tim. *On Stranger Tides.* This is one of Powers' usual mixes of fantasy, history, and myth. In this case, we have pirates, voodoo, and the Fountain of Youth.

Rostand, Edmond. *Cyrano de Bergerac.* More than just a warrior, this hero has honor in his heart, romance in his soul, and an utter lack of fear—the ultimate swashbuckler.

Sabatini, Rafael. This man is perhaps more responsible for the swashbuckling genre as we know it today than any other individual. Several of his books have been translated into the finest films in the genre. His works include *The Black Swan, Captain Blood* (and its two sequels, *Captain Blood Returns* and *The Fortunes of Captain Blood*), *The Sea Hawk, Scaramouche* (and its sequel, *Scaramouche the Kingmaker*), and *St. Martin's Summer.*

Scott, Sir Walter. *The Pirate.* This story is full of secret passages, long-lost sons, and magic, with a hero influenced by the Romantic Movement.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Island.* The well-known and often-filmed tale of Jim Hawkins and Long John Silver. Stevenson also wrote the popular *Kidnapped* and *Master of Ballantrae.*

Nonfiction

For those who want a grounding in the real lives of these people, this brief list of piratical books should get you started; any good-sized library should have many more good sources in the history and biography sections.

Cordingly, David. *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and Reality of Life among the Pirates.* (1995). This book has chapters on pirate ships, life at sea, raiding port towns, female pirates, the hunting down of the pirates, and their punishments if caught.

Gosse, Philip. *The History of Piracy.* (1934). This one is hard to find, but it's worth the search for its depth of detail not found elsewhere.

Platt, Richard. *Pirate.* (1994). This takes an up-close look at how pirates lived, from the discipline maintained onboard to the cunning ruses pirates used to lure their prey. Though this book is aimed at children, the information and wonderful illustrations make it well worth finding.

Sherry, Frank. *Raiders & Rebels: The Golden Age of Piracy.* (1986). This book is more substantial and is perfect for the serious researcher. It is out of print, however, so head to the library for this one.

warriors as diplomats, but thieves seem a bit of a stretch. By altering the role to fit the class, you have a spy who uses her diplomatic cover to sneak about and gather information illicitly.

Some brief descriptions of several possible swashbuckling roles follow. Each of them includes a few suggested nonweapon proficiencies. As a literate culture is the norm for swashbuckling campaigns, all the PCs should be able to read and write their native tongue.

Bandits

Whether highwaymen or forest bandits, ruffians in the city's back alleys or "Gentleman" burglars who steal baubles from their victims' boudoirs in exchange for a kiss, these adventurous outlaws steal from others to make their living. They might share their take with the poor or save it to buy the freedom of an imprisoned loved one or liege. (True swashbucklers are never motivated solely by so base an emotion as greed.)

Recommended Proficiencies: *Appraising, Blind-fighting, Jumping, Land-based Riding, Rope Use, Tightrope Walking.*

3rd Edition: *Appraise, Jump, Ride, Use Rope, and Balance skills, and the Blind-Fight feat.*

Diplomats

As noted above, PCs of all stripes can make good diplomats. Of course, role-playing skill and a bit of eloquence come in handy as well. Adventures for diplomat characters could include a great deal of intrigue, an essential ingredient of any swashbuckling campaign. Most diplomats do a lot of traveling, too; locales can include the most exotic, most dangerous places in the campaign. (This also allows the DM to get the PCs to a new location easily.) As noted above, "diplomat" can merely be a pretty word for spy. In campaigns featuring these sorts of characters, the PCs might have to enter the heartland of the enemy, risking death if their goals are even suspected.

As there are few freelance diplomats, PCs with this vocation are likely to have a patron. A character such as this should be an NPC who can provide guidance on proper behavior, cultural information, plenty of adventure hooks, and even a helping hand once in a while if necessary.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Ancient History, Etiquette, Heraldry, Local History, Modern Language, Reading Lips, Disguise, Forgery.*

3rd Edition: *Knowledge (ancient history), Diplomacy, Knowledge (heraldry), Knowledge (local history), Speak Language, Read Lips, Disguise, and Forgery skills would be appropriate.*

Entertainers

Travelers of another kind, talented performers are in demand in many royal courts, city festivals, and expensive parties such as formal or masquerade balls. PCs can have their adventures in these locales, rubbing elbows with wealthy, important, beautiful people, or on the road between engagements. Warriors can be strongmen, animal trainers, or weapons masters; mages can perform "stage magic" or provide special effects for other shows; priests can use their power to impress and awe (and thus, subtly demonstrate the greatness of their deity); and rogues can perform as jongleurs, minstrels, or highwire artists.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Animal Handling and Training, Artistic Ability, dancing, Musical Instrument, Juggling, Jumping, Singing, Tightrope Walking, Tumbling.*

3rd Edition: *Handle Animal, Perform, Jump, Balance, and Tumble.*

Explorers

Like Columbus, Magellan, Cook, and many more, PC explorers can venture to the farthest reaches of the campaign setting, either for themselves or for a patron. Strange races, bizarre landscapes, and new sources of treasure and magic lie just over the horizon. Are your PCs brave enough to risk their lives on long, treacherous journeys to claim these things as their own? Much like dungeon-delvers, all classes of PCs contribute to the success of a group of explorers.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Direction Sense, Fire-building, Fishing, Navigation, Mountaineering, Swimming, Survival, Weather Sense.*

3rd Edition: *the Intuit Direction, Wilderness Lore, Knowledge (nature), and Swim.*

Freelancers

These swashbucklers are the traditional sort of "wandering heroes" already reflected by the typical D&D adventuring party. While executing a swashbuckling campaign with this kind of an aimless approach is certainly possible, most prefer the tighter structure of a more focused campaign. That's not to everyone's tastes though; many players are uncomfortable with their PCs working for an NPC, even if she is the Castellan, Royal Mage, Guildmaster, or Prime Minister. For those up to this challenge, a traditional party of PCs can buckle their swashes as well as anyone else.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Any.*

Soldiers

Like the Musketeers, the PCs can be members of a formal law-enforcement or military hierarchy. The party itself serves as the "unit," that would be most commonly classed as "irregulars." This is not due to any eccentricity on the PCs' parts, but because a party of adventurers do not fit into what we consider a typical military structure. The PCs, once they prove capable and trustworthy, can be entrusted with many missions other than just battlefield duty, such as reconnaissance, infiltration, or even as a "special ops" team used to perform top-secret missions. All character classes are welcome in such a group, as a balanced party fares better than a party overloaded with any one class in combat situations. The perfect supplement to run a Musketeer-era D&D campaign is *A Mighty Fortress*, the Renaissance period historical supplement by Steve Winter. Another kind of military organization (often much less formally organized) is a group of rebels. Like the Rebel Alliance in *Star Wars*, the PCs can be struggling to free themselves and perhaps the entire campaign world from the grip of evil.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Armorer, Bowyer/Fletcher, Engineering, Leatherworking, Set Snares, Tracking, Weaponsmithing.*

3rd Edition: *Craft (armorsmithing), Craft (bowmaking), Knowledge (engineering), Wilderness Lore, and Craft (weaponsmithing) and Track feat.)*

Nobles

These PCs are born with rank and privilege but find the noble's life unfulfilling at best. Maybe they are simply bored, or perhaps some social injustice exists (such as legal slavery), and the PCs decide that it is up to them to act. Often, to protect their families as well as their own position and identities, such heroes venture forth under the twin covers of night and masks. PCs of any class can be found among the nobility; the rustic rangers and druids might be the younger children of the family who are allowed to pursue their own interests, or perhaps the family estates are rural ones.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Dancing, Etiquette, Gaming, Heraldry, Hunting, Riding.*

3rd Edition: Perform, Diplomacy, Bluff, Knowledge (heraldry), Wilderness Lore, and Ride.

Pirates

The quintessential image of the swashbuckler, pirates usually come in two categories. True pirates attack any ship that comes within range that they think they can catch and overpower. Privateers are those who are granted Letters of Marque, usually by the government, to legally hunt the ships of that country's enemies. To those they prey upon, privateers are wicked pirates—no more, no less. To their countrymen, however, they are often patriots and heroes. Again, as combat is a common occurrence among swashbuckling pirates, all PC classes are welcome among a pirate crew.

Recommended Proficiencies: *Direction Sense, Navigation, Seamanship, Seamstress/Tailor (to repair torn sails), Swimming, Weather Sense.*

In 3rd Edition: *Intuit Direction, Profession (sailor), Profession (tailor), Swim, and Wilderness Lore.*

These categories are not mutually exclusive. The Scarlet Pimpernel, for example, is a noble Englishman who sneaks into Paris (using the skills of a master spy) to rescue French aristocrats from the vengeful Republic's "Madame Guillotine." Similarly, in most versions of the Robin Hood legend, Robin is a nobleman who rebels against an unjust government by taking up banditry to help the oppressed.

Swashbuckling Settings

Unless the campaign is airborne (as with the SPELLJAMMER® setting), the DM has a simple choice to make between a land- or water-based campaign.

Landlubbers

With land-based campaigns, DMs have the same adventure choices as in other settings: dungeon, wilderness, and city adventures. Most good campaigns have all three types of adventures, but for swashbuckling campaigns, dungeons are perhaps the least appropriate. Dark caverns and monsters are not the stuff of which derring-do is made. If the monster isn't intelligent enough to understand the PCs' witty banter, it's hardly a worthy adversary.

To keep the dungeon element in the campaign, simply rethink the basic idea of the dungeon itself. Prison cells exist under many castles, and numerous cities have extensive catacombs, sewers, or necropoli beneath them that can lure PCs away from the light of the sun. Monsters or villains might take up residence in these places.

Urban adventures are often the best choice for a swashbuckling campaign. Not only does the city serve the PCs as a bountiful source of adventure hooks but as the PCs' home base. In this way, anything that threatens the city threatens the PCs. The PCs also have a great deal of freedom of movement, which can be a problem if the DM isn't ready to handle it. Rather than trying to detail an entire city, DMs should familiarize the players with one section of town. Describe this area in enough detail that just about anything the PCs would need or encounter in their day-to-day lives can be found in this neighborhood, ward, or quarter of the city. Equipment, information (both factual and gossip), healing, and adventure seeds should all be found here.

Wilderness scenarios are the logical bridge between the other two types. This type of adventure includes missions of exploration, military forays, rooting out bandits, or tracking and eliminating unknown beasts that threaten the farms, orchards, and livestock that feed the city.

Seafaring

Sea-based campaigns are simpler in some ways. (This applies to SPELLJAMMER and other airborne campaigns as well.) For at least part of the time, the PCs are assumed to be aboard their vessel, be it a sailing ship, a spelljamming craft, or a magical castle floating amid the clouds. While aboard, the PCs can only go so far, which makes it easier for the DM to keep the adventure on track and moving forward. Whether the PCs are explorers, merchants, diplomats on a long voyage, pirates, or privateers, adventure always awaits. Not only is such travel dangerous in itself, but bad weather, bad food or water, sabotage, attacks from enemies or pirates, and dangerous native plants, animals, and peoples threaten such travelers.

A new dimension for aquatic D&D games opened with the *Sea of Fallen Stars* campaign expansion for the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, published last year. This book details Faerûn's Inner Sea, both at the surface level and far beneath the waves. It is also the first full-fledged underwater campaign setting ever written for the D&D game, and a wonderful tool to experience swashbuckling beneath the waves, regardless of the setting you use.

Raison d'Etre

Most good roleplaying campaigns have a strong theme that drives the PCs forward. In many cases, this theme is as simple as "defeat evil in all its forms." But swashbuckling campaigns need something more than that, something the PCs and players can get excited about doing—after all, the PCs are risking their lives for this ideal time and again. Rather than fighting *against* an enemy, have them fight *for* something.

Something To Fight For

In the Michael York Musketeers films, there is a sequence when the Musketeers have breakfast in the middle of a battle. The characters are supposed to be fighting against their foes, but they do not particularly care about the fight or its outcome; they are much more concerned with winning a bet. When they are working to save the Queen of France from being exposed to a royal scandal, however, they know they are involved in deadly, serious work. Why do the Musketeers consider one situation trivial and the other important? Because the characters care about the Queen. She and the King are their patrons, and it is a Musketeer's duty to protect them.

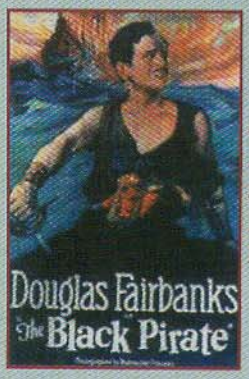
In *Star Wars*, the rebels aren't just fighting *against* the evil Empire, they're fighting *for* the freedom of the galaxy. Robin Hood isn't fighting *against* the sheriff so much as he's fighting *for* England and his true king.

Camaraderie

Finding something that all the PCs can believe in enough to fight for is the DM's challenge. If the players have created a good group of swashbuckling PCs that fit one or more of the roles described

Recommended Viewing

Films are wonderful inspirations for gaming. They show the settings, clothes, and tools of the trade in a way a book or game cannot. Watch a few swashbuckling films with the gaming group to get into the proper frame of mind. Most of these films are available on video, and many are often played on the American Movie Classics channel, among others. Many more swashbucklers exist,



The original Hollywood swashbuckler, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.

including some recent films (such as *Cutthroat Island* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*), but the ones below are the best.

Against All Flags (1952). Starring an aging but still vigorous Errol Flynn, this film depicts the infiltration of a "pirate nation" by British spies. This film costars a young Anthony Quinn and the ultimate swashbuckling woman: Maureen O'Hara.

At Sword's Point (1952). While not the best film on the list, it is enjoyable watching the children of the original Musketeers taking up the fight to protect the Queen of France, this time from the machinations of the evil Duc de Lavalle. Starring Cornel Wilde as the son of D'Artagnan, Alan Hale Jr. as the son of Porthos, Dan O'Herlihy as the son of Aramis, and Maureen O'Hara as Claire, Athos' daughter, this movie is wonderfully fun.

The Black Pirate (1926). This silent film stars Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., the first Hollywood swashbuckler who set the standard for all who followed.

The Black Swan (1942). This film stars Tyrone Power and Maureen O'Hara. It tells the archetypal story of the devil-may-care buccaneer who's won over by the fiery spirit of a strong, beautiful woman.

Captain Blood (1935). Errol Flynn's starring debut tells the story of Dr. Peter Blood as he goes from country physician to pirate captain. It starts a little slowly, but the last hour is worth the wait.

The Crimson Pirate (1952). Starring the amazing Burt Lancaster and Nick Cravat (who, though neither deaf nor mute, didn't speak in his films, as he had trouble remembering his lines), this most tongue-in-cheek of pirate films succeeds so well that it is one of the best films of the genre.

The Flame and the Arrow (1950). This film again pairs real-life friends Burt Lancaster and Nick Cravat. This time, they are in Italy for a reworking of the Robin Hood legend. This film shows how to take a plot based on a story we all know and twist it to fit a new setting—a lesson all DMs should learn.

The Mark of Zorro (1940). Tyrone Power stars in this excellent remake of the 1920 silent film of the same name starring Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.

Antonio Banderas strikes a pose as Zorro.

The Mask of Zorro (1998). Hollywood proved it still knew how to make swashbucklers with this film. Starring Antonio Banderas in a role he was born to play, Anthony Hopkins, and the stunning Catherine Zeta-Jones, this is the most accessible swashbuckler film to newcomers to the genre.

The Prisoner of Zenda (1937). Starring Ronald Colman and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., this classic film highlights a story in which a reluctant hero has the weight of a royal crown and the fate of a nation thrust squarely upon his shoulders. Of course, he falls in love in the middle of it all. This film was remade in the 1950s with Stewart Granger and James Mason, but this version is superior.

Basil Rathbone as the wicked Sir Guy faces Errol Flynn's Loxley in the Adventures of Robin Hood.

The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938). If you see only one film off this list, make it this one. Errol Flynn, the angelic Olivia de Havilland, and a great supporting cast make this the definitive swashbuckling film.

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves: While this 1991 action flick is not a very good Robin Hood film, it's actually a pretty entertaining D&D movie. The film has an outcast noble fighting for a worthy cause, a band of charming rogues, a despicable, over-the-top villain (Alan Rickman), an evil witch, a mysterious outsider (Morgan Freeman's Azim could have come straight out of Zakhara), a strong love interest, and some great action scenes.

Even in the silent films, you could practically see the witty reparte.

Robin of Sherwood (1984–1986). This outstanding BBC television series added strong elements of mythology and fantasy to the Robin Hood mythos (several of which were later "borrowed" by *Prince of Thieves*). Ancient gods, evil sorcerers, magical weapons, prophecies, Fate, and demonic possessions make this the best fantasy TV show ever. For all that, though, there's the sometimes glacial pacing and a lack of high-energy swashbuckling. Plus, the videos are difficult to find. If you can find these, watch them.

Scaramouche (1952). This classic, lavish film stars Stewart Granger and Janet Leigh in the midst of the French Revolution. The sword-fight finale in the opera house still amazes over forty years after it was filmed.

The Sea Hawk (1940). Possibly the best pirate movie ever, this film features Errol Flynn at his most dashing. The British "Sea Dogs" of the reign of Elizabeth I, led by Flynn, of course, do battle against the Spanish while two enemies fall in love.

The Three Musketeers. (1973). Opinions vary about which version of this often-filmed story is the best. My money's on this film (and its "sequel," *The Four Musketeers,* 1974, shot at the same time) starring Michael York, Charleton Heston, Oliver Reed, Richard Chamberlain, Faye Dunaway, and Racquel Welch.

Treasure Island (1950). This is the best-known film version of R. L. Stevenson's story, with Robert Newton relishing his role as Long John Silver. If for no other reason, see this so you'll know which character your players are imitating with their "pirate voices.

The Robin of Sherwood *series practically writes your adventures for you, complete with player characters*

above, the job should be easier, but it still falls to the DM to bring the PCs together.

Find a common link in the PCs' background, or develop one yourself. The PCs could all be distantly related, they could be the children of famous heroes, their families could all belong to the same church or other organization, they could have grown up together as life-long friends, or perhaps they're all hired by a mysterious patron for their first adventure.

A benefactor or patron can also bring a group together as well as provide the PCs with a reason to fight. A patron might recruit the PCs (perhaps bringing them together for the first time), supply them with information (and adventure hooks), and help the group fence the valuable trinkets they acquire. Patrons can also arrange for training, healing, and curse removal, introduce PCs into important social circles, and more. In exchange, the PCs perform missions or "quests" for their patron.

This relationship can be as formal as the players are comfortable with. The patron can be limited to only occasional appearances if the players prefer their PCs to be independent, or the characters can literally be employed by their patron. The Musketeers are an example of this sort of patronage, though they have plenty of freedom as well.

Patrons can be retired adventurers, politicians, guildmasters, members of some secret society (such as the Network or the Harpers), or a wealthy family who wants to protect the land and people that helped them become rich. Of course, patrons might have some secrets themselves that they don't reveal to the PCs. In *Star Wars*, Luke's patron is first Obi-Wan, then Yoda. Not all patrons need to be lone individuals, either. D'artagnan has Aramis, Athos, and Porthos as knowledgable, "big brother" patrons "who show the young Gascon the ropes of being a Musketeer. Also, Rudolf Rassendyl (*The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Rupert of Hentzau*) has the dual patrons of Colonel Sapt and Fritz Tarlenheim to teach him how to be a king.

An Archenemy

The final piece of the theme is the nemesis. Every swashbuckler has one foe he hates more than any other. The Musketeers have Cardinal Richelieu, Robin Hood has Sir Guy and the Sheriff of Nottingham, and the Jedi in *The Phantom Menace* have Darth Maul.

Every good swashbuckling campaign should develop some nemeses for the PCs, but it is best not to force any one NPC or group into that role. The DM should prepare several foes with nemesis potential, and then simply see what happens during the course of the campaign. Classed NPCs make better nemeses than monsters, but exceptions are possible. Does one of these groups consistently best the PCs at something? Is there a group whose aims often conflict directly with those of the PCs? (Perhaps this NPC or group of NPCs has a patron like the PCs, but the two patrons are actually each other's nemeses!) Pay attention to the villains the players talk about outside of the game; if one figure or group stands out, the players have helped out the DM in choosing a nemesis.

Be warned, though: Overusing a nemesis weakens the concept. In most swashbuckling stories, the hero goes through a many travails, overcoming them all until she finally confronts her nemesis. Save the nemesis for the high points of the campaign, and do not let the PCs defeat their nemesis too soon. Otherwise, much of the focus that the campaign has developed might be lost.

For the DM

A DM should promote the atmosphere and style of swashbuckling in play. Don't tell the player her attack roll was not sufficient to hit her PC's target; describe how the buccaneer narrowly avoided the PC's sword lunge by backpeddling at the last moment. Subsume the mechanics of the game as much as possible, and concentrate on telling the story with the players. If the DM promotes the humor and action of a great swashbuckler story, the players will catch on.

DMs can also promote a swashbuckling atmosphere with a careful choice of rewards for the PCs.

Glory, Not Gold

Consider the material rewards in most D&D campaigns. While bags of gold and platinum might light the fires of avarice in a player's eyes, such treasures are heavy, often loud, and difficult to conceal. Certainly, sacks of coins and other loot are common in most AD&D games, but how can one leap over tables, swing on chandeliers, and slide down banisters when weighed down with hundreds of coins? Offer PCs gem-encrusted necklaces, jeweled tiaras, diamond rings, and other baubles. Not only are these items easier to carry and conceal, but the average finely wrought trinket is worth far more than a bag of gold.

Travel Light

Suits of *platemail +4* and *two-handed swords +3* don't help the players think of their PCs as swashbucklers. Offer other types of magic that allow the players to gallivant freely. Items like *rings* and *cloaks of protection, cloaks of displacement, bracers of defense, brooches of shielding*, and all sorts of magical gems and jewelry are ideal for this purpose. For offensive magic, lighter weapons are better for swashbucklers. Magical daggers up to longswords best fit the style, and a magical *rapier of quickness* is always a favorite of swashbuckling PCs.

Honors & Accolades

Give your swashbuckling heroes nonmaterial awards such as medals, memberships into elite and prestigious clubs, knightly orders or associations (such as the Harpers, the King's Musketeers, or the Solamnic knights of the DRAGONLANCE® setting), honorary or military ranks, titles, or promotions, or simply the gratitude of friendly and powerful or influential NPCs. After all, what hero wouldn't want to be able to call upon the Chief Constable, a High Court Bailiff, or even the Royal Chancellor for the occasional favor?

Dale Donovan had to fend off his collective nemeses (a deadline, getting married, buying a house, and moving in, all in the space of a month) to finish this article. Now he's going to rest, assemble veritable tons of furniture, and dream of buckling a few swashes with Maureen O'Hara.

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40 Swashbuckling Adventures

by Michael T. Kuciak and Malcolm Haymes

Swashbucklers are a foppish, urbane, and honorable lot with quick blades and touchy egos. They couldn't care less about crawling around in ruins—they'd rather leave that to peasants who don't mind getting dirty. They are a different breed from "normal" adventurers, and as such they need their own brand of adventure.

The following scenarios are designed to help the DM swing into a swashbuckling campaign. Swashbucklers must deal with everything from romantic court intrigue to frontline warfare. Thus, the scenarios presented here tend to blend into one another. Rather than setting up each scenario as an unconnected, stand-alone adventure, you can mix and match the scenarios to quickly bring together an entire campaign. For instance, you could start out with an Intrigue that the PCs fail to thwart, leading to a declaration of War. While at War, one of the PCs falls in Love, which might lead to a duel on the High Seas, and so on.

So, toss aside the dungeon maps, strap on a rapier blade and a winning smile, and hit the high seas. All for one, and one for all!

All's Fair in Love . . .

1 A very attractive—and very married—member of the court offers one of the PCs a midnight rendezvous. The courtesan threatens to cause trouble if the character does not acquiesce.

2 A hurried messenger comes to one of the PCs' homes bearing a compromising love letter. The messenger was in such a rush that he got the wrong address; the letter is intended for the PC's neighbor, who turns out to be an important noble traveling incognito.

3 A PC becomes romantically entangled with a lady in waiting or other court servant. The servant catches wind of an assassination plot and can trust no one but the PC with news of the attempt.

4 A noble becomes enamored with a PC's love and sets a plan in motion to get the hero out of the picture. The ruthless noble starts with bribery but quickly moves to intimidation and even assassination if the PC does not see things the noble's way.

5 A PC receives gifts and letters from a secret admirer. Finally, the admirer asks for a midnight rendezvous. It could be a chance at forbidden love or part of a trap to lead the unwary character into an ambush.

6 A major NPC falls in love with one of the characters. The NPC then turns out to be connected to the major villain of the story. It's a complicated situation, as the beloved returns the PC's favors and might not even know the villain and swashbuckler are at odds. The PC might want to use the beloved as a back door to foiling the villains plans, but that would be dishonorable and would quickly end the relationship.

7 The queen falls in love with one of the PCs but keeps her affections to herself. It comes to pass that the queen must go on a diplomatic mission. She specifically requests that the PC accompany her. In the course of the mission, she professes her love. Unfortunately, an advisor close to the king overhears the conversation. He confronts both queen and PC with blackmail to further his own agenda.

. . . and War

8 The peasantry revolts against their tyrannical king, whom the PCs serve. The king commands the swashbucklers to put down the rebellion, forcing the PCs to choose between duty and justice. In a worst-case scenario, the rebellion seizes the entire country, and the nobility—along with the PCs—are sent to the guillotine.

9 One of the swashbuckler's rivals sends assassins against the PC while she is in the midst of fighting a war. Soon, the enemy troops are the least of the PC's worries.

10 A PC is captured and held by an enemy for ransom. While in captivity, the PC meets a fellow prisoner who knows of a plot to kill the king. The PC must escape and foil the plot in time to save his ruler.

11 One of the PCs lives in the shadow of a famous or notorious relative. A declaration of war would give the swashbuckler a chance to prove to everybody he is his own person, which might lead to foolhardy risks.

12 A wounded enemy soldier is put under a PC's guardianship. The two have a lot in common and soon form a strong friendship. This relationship might be sincere, or it might be merely a ruse to give the soldier a chance to cause mischief or escape.

13 On the eve of a major battle, a PC discovers that her commanding officer is a traitor who is planning to betray her troops and lose the fight. Our hero must gather enough proof and foil the commander before the first light of dawn.

14 The PCs' army is low on provisions and ammunition. The king cannot or will not send relief. The heroes must find a way to supply the troops and continue the fight.

15 A rival contrives to have a PC placed on the front line in a battle, almost ensuring his death. If the PC somehow survives, he can walk away a hero and thwart the rival's plan.

Intrigue

16 A villainous NPC is making short work of his enemies by goading them into duels and quickly defeating them—even opponents that everyone knows to be superior fighters. It turns out the duelist is arranging to have his opponents quietly poisoned the night before each fight to slow them down.

17 A PC's dueling instructor dies in a challenge under mysterious circumstances. The duel was a trap engineered by a jealous rival instructor. The characters must unravel the mystery and exact revenge.

The Essence of Swashbuckling

These scenarios borrow heavily from classical literature, particularly the writings of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Alexandre Dumas. Dumas wrote The Three Musketeers, The Man in the Iron Mask, and The Count of Monte Cristo, among many others. Do yourself a favor and sit down with some of these stories before running a swashbuckler campaign to catch the attitudes and settings of these unique adventures. Dumas's characters are all larger than life and act as if they know it. Every beautiful woman is "the most beautiful woman in all of France." Every swordsman is "one of the greatest swordsmen in all the world." Take some time to get a feel for the tone, because you can't do justice to a duel with the Cardinal's Guards if you describe it like a dungeon skirmish. These guys are not a grunting pack of kobolds! They are the "deadliest blades to ever walk the streets of Paris!"

Swashbucklers are highly social. (What good is it to save king and country if nobody is around to watch?) As such, they typically swear themselves to the service of a nation, group, or cause. Swashbucklers feel strongly about their loyalties, as their service has a direct reflection on their honor and reputations. This makes it easier for you to get the PCs involved with an adventure. There is no need to bribe them with piles of treasure; if the King commands them to a "mission of vital importance," they must go.

18 A PC discovers that some of her old friends are plotting to depose the tyrannical king. The hero is torn between duty, friendship, and justice.

19 The current queen is a second spouse. She plots to have her son rise above the firstborn prince from the king's previous marriage. She will stop at nothing to achieve her goals, including discredit and assassination.

20 The PCs are sworn to protect a newly crowned young queen. Rivals and enemies circle like sharks, waiting for the first opportunity to pull the inexperienced queen off the throne. The swashbucklers are some of the only people loyal enough to protect her.

21 An important noble is discovered in possession of state secrets in a compromising situation, and the penalty is death. The PCs finds out that the items were planted by a devious courtier. Our heroes must prove the noble's innocence before she goes to the guillotine, possibly winning her love in the meantime.

22 The PCs find out that a close relative of the king (spouse, child, or another) is hatching terrible plots and causing trouble. The king would never believe his relative is capable of any wrongdoing unless the PCs can come up with unshakable evidence. Without evidence, the PCs fall under suspicion of plotting by proxy.

23 A friend secretly passes on a death warrant to a PC ... with the hero's name on it! The paper is unsigned. Who sent it? Who was supposed to carry it out? Are there others?

24 A very prominent religious leader declares the queen and her court, including the PCs, to be heretics. This causes every kind of problem with followers of the cleric's church, including protest, rebellion, withdrawn assistance, and assassination attempts. The religious leader might have more insidious goals in mind, such as a coup.

25 One of the PCs is honored with a post in the King's Guard. This brings glory, but along with the title comes enmity from others in rival branches of service. The PC is suddenly up to her neck in enemies she has never even met.

26 Friends of a PC contrive a plot to increase their power and influence to the detriment of others. They promise the hero advancement and reward if the plot works, as long as the character keeps quiet. If the intrigue is discovered, the PC looks like a silent partner in the whole rotten deal.

27 The queen is secretly having an affair with a lord from another nation. One of the king's advisors discovers the affair and sends the swashbucklers on an urgent mission to deliver a forged note from the queen telling the lord to come to court right away. The unscrupulous advisor plans to catch the queen and the lord in a trap, sparking a scandal and possibly a war, all so the advisor can increase his power base. The PCs must unlock the puzzle and set things right.

28 The king's closest advisor, a cleric of somewhat questionable morals, has the king befuddled into thinking his own personal guard are plotting against him. The king fires the guard and replaces them with troops of the cleric's choosing. The PCs (who might have been part of the original guard) find out that the replacements are part of the cleric's plot to maneuver his own men closer to the king and stage a coup. Part of the plot involves the cleric's men dressing in the old guard uniforms so everybody will think the spurned soldiers are out for revenge. It's a race against time to save the king, stop the evil cleric, and clear their names.

29 The PCs serve the ruler of a small, neutral nation. Two larger, warring nations request the honor of using the PCs' homeland as neutral territory for discussing a peace agreement. In the midst of the summit, an explosion goes off, and many are killed. The PCs must crack the mystery while calming both nations before they start a war.

High Seas

30 War erupts, and the king secretly asks the PCs to become privateers to prey upon the enemy fleet. This scenario gives the PCs the chance to switch identities and act as villains.

31 While in prison (perhaps as a result of an intrigue), one of the PCs befriends a dying cellmate who tells of buried treasure. Once he is out of prison, the PC looks for it. Unfortunately, a corrupt guard overhears the conversation and shares it with his brother: a pirate captain.

32 Pirates raid a ship bearing a princess. The pirate captain takes her back to his hidden lair and holds her for ransom. The king sends the PCs to find her. By the time the PCs find the secret island lair, captain and princess have fallen in love and plan to make off with the ransom money together.

33 The PCs must deliver an urgent message to a noble of a country whose shores are blockaded. To fulfill the mission, the PCs must somehow sneak or fight through the coastal navy.

34 Terrifying stories abound of a ghost ship and its undead crew that stalk other vessels, killing all hands on board. The PCs are sent to get to the bottom of the mystery. It could be a real ghost ship or a ruse played by a particularly clever, bloodthirsty pirate captain.

35 While en route to the king, a ship bearing tribute money from a foreign nation sinks in a storm. The king sends the PCs to salvage the gold, but the other nation sends their own team to recover the gold and thereby avoid paying. Undersea inhabitants might also complicate matters.

36 A famous pirate gang has struck the king's vessels for the last time. The PCs are part of the crew sent to hunt them down and end their raids once and for all.

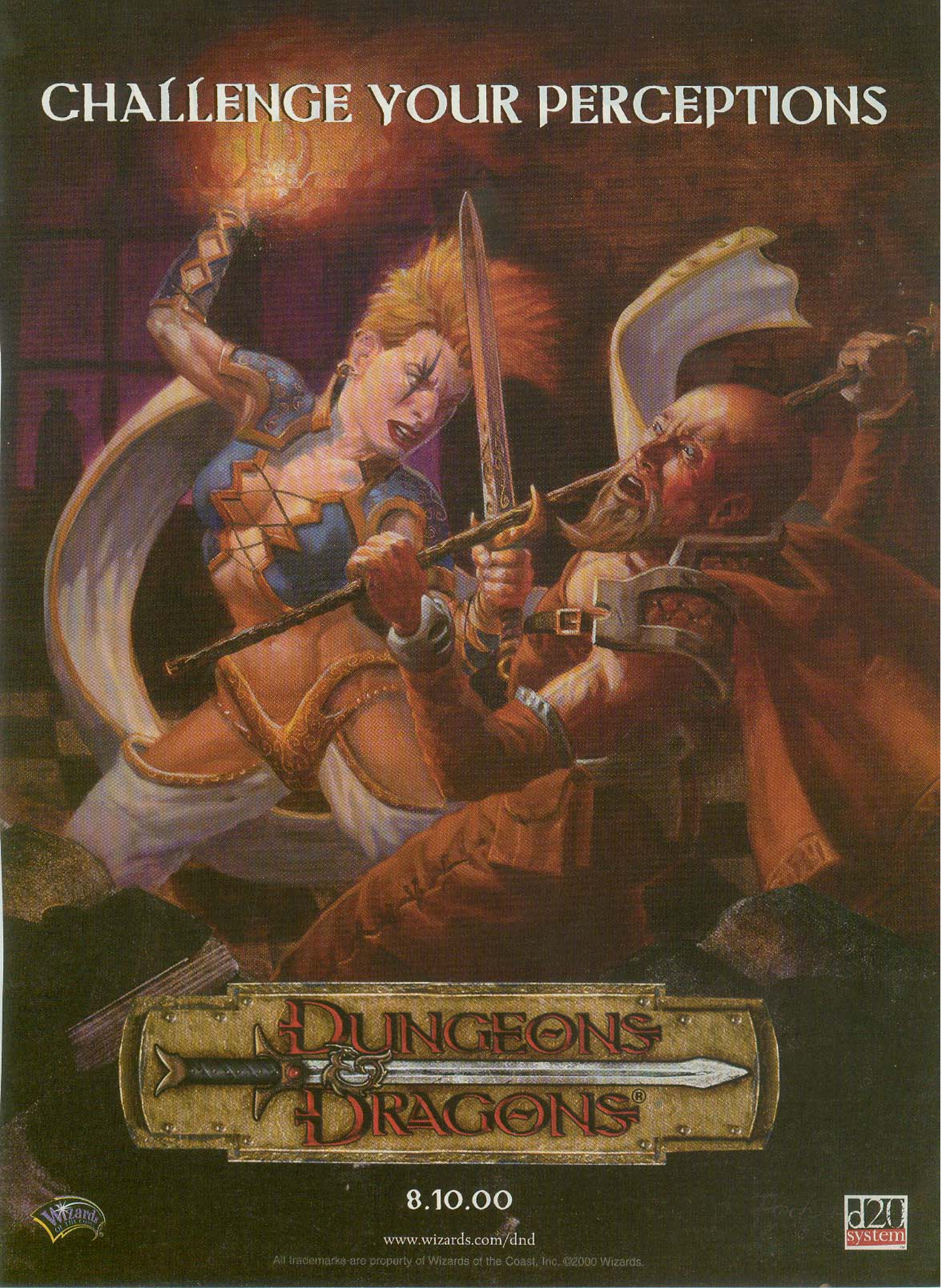
37 The queen falls ill or is poisoned, and the only cure is a plant from a far away land. The only person in recent memory who has sailed those waters is a notorious pirate king. The PCs must bribe, intimidate, or join the pirate king to retrieve the plant.

38 An honorable merchant hires the swashbucklers to escort a shipment of silks to his home port. The profitable shipment is the merchant's only chance of escaping debt, dishonor, and ruin. A rival merchant house sends agents to stop the ship and put the good merchant out of business for good.

39 The king sends the PCs to chart and explore several mysterious islands discovered in a recent war. Anything at all could be on these islands, including mystical natives, bloodthirsty pirates, ancient secrets, fantastic creatures, and more.

40 A captain of the navy discovers a new, unknown land filled with strange creatures and untold riches. He even has several odd artifacts to prove his story. The captain and his crew are the only people alive who have sailed these waters; all other expeditions have vanished. In actuality, the new land is a lie, and the artifacts are contrived junk. This is all part of the vicious captain's attempt to increase his standing in the eyes of the king, as well as reap a profit by salvaging the ships sent to investigate the captain's claims, all of which he attacks and sinks. When the king sends the PCs to explore the "new land," the captain sets out to kill them and sink their ship, just as he did with all the others.

Mike & Malcolm belong to the subtler branch of swashbucklers, those who never reveal too much about their true identities...until it is far too late for the villain to escape.



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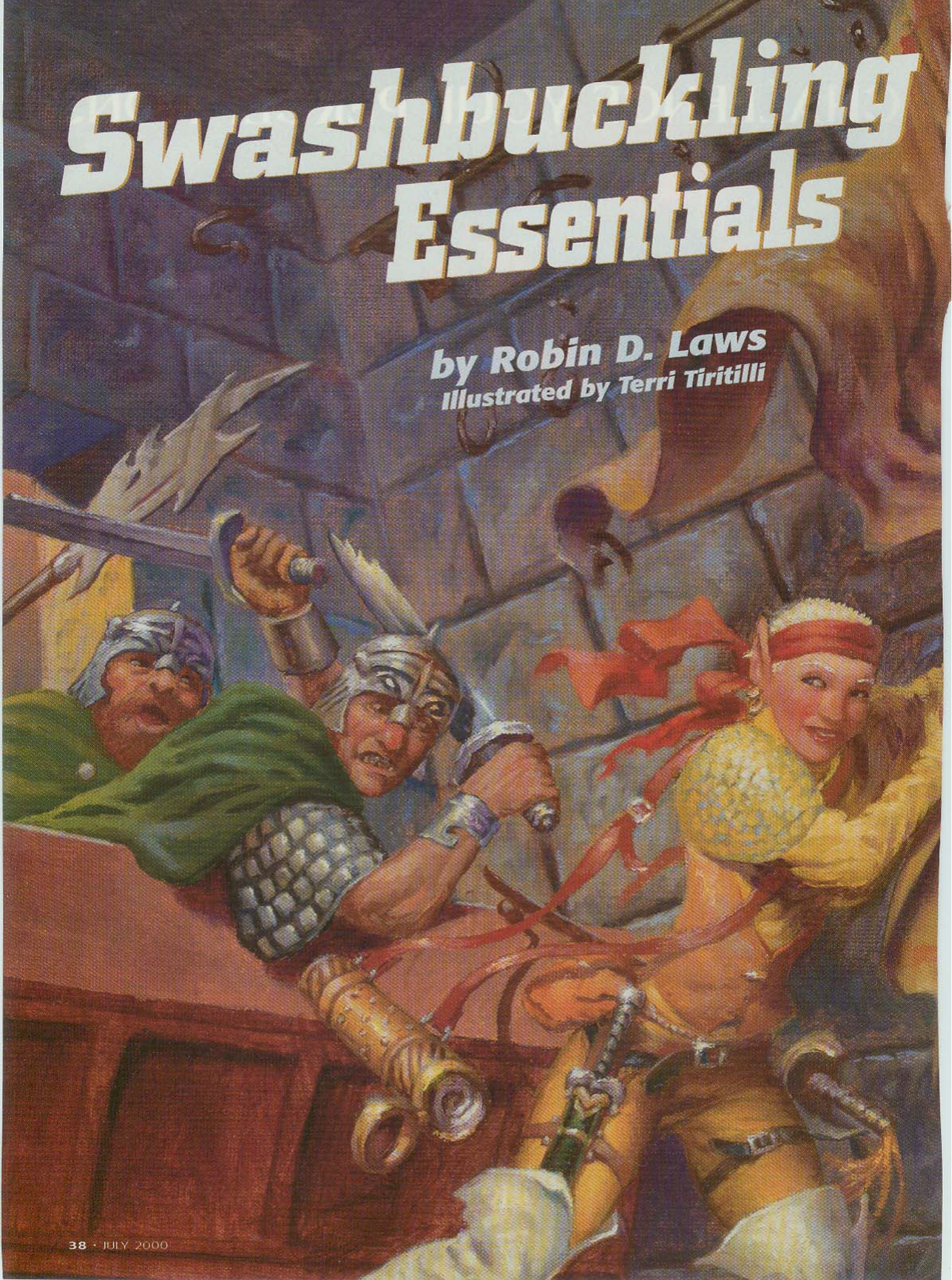
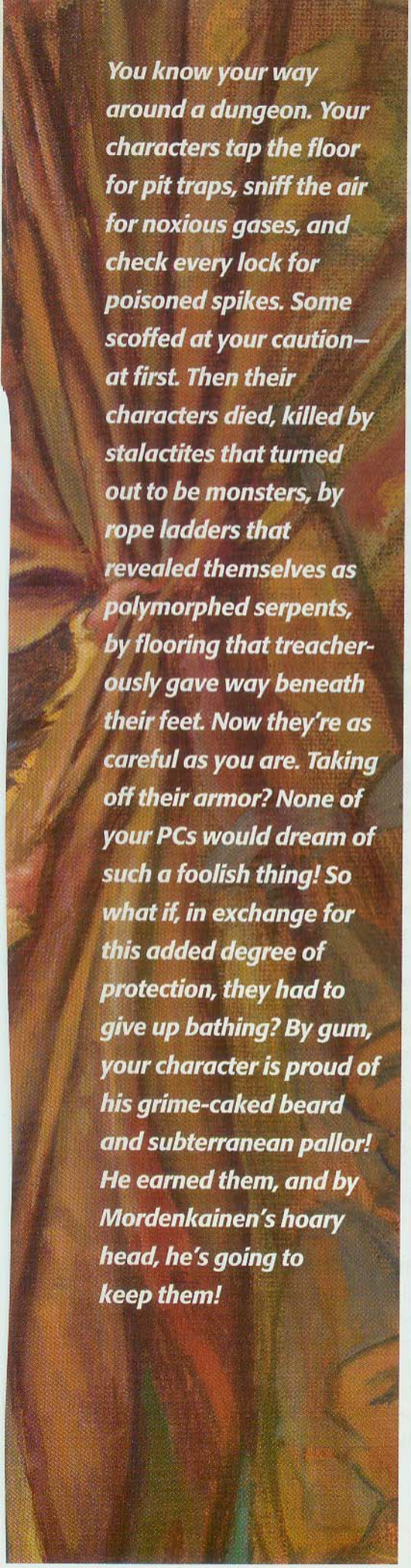
Swashbuckling Essentials

by Robin D. Laws
Illustrated by Terri Tiritilli





You know your way around a dungeon. Your characters tap the floor for pit traps, sniff the air for noxious gases, and check every lock for poisoned spikes. Some scoffed at your caution—at first. Then their characters died, killed by stalactites that turned out to be monsters, by rope ladders that revealed themselves as polymorphed serpents, by flooring that treacherously gave way beneath their feet. Now they're as careful as you are. Taking off their armor? None of your PCs would dream of such a foolish thing! So what if, in exchange for this added degree of protection, they had to give up bathing? By gum, your character is proud of his grime-caked beard and subterranean pallor! He earned them, and by Mordenkainen's hoary head, he's going to keep them!

But wait! *Your DM announces a change of pace. Starting next week; she's starting a swashbuckling campaign. She's trading in her dungeons and trackless wilds for tall ships and gilded palaces. You can kiss your* glyphs of warding, fireballs, *and bashed-in dungeon doors goodbye: From here on in, it's letters of marque, cannons, and clever infiltrations of the cruel governor's stronghold. If your PC is to prosper outside the dungeon's depths, you're going to have to adopt a whole new way of thinking. Here, then, are twelve tips for the prospective swashbuckler.*

1 He Who Hesitates is Lost

In a dungeon, you expect your DM to make you ruerash action. It doesn't matter whether you're pulling a lever, grabbing a gemstone, or poking a mysterious, mummified corpse: If you do it without thinking carefully first, you're taking your character's life in your hands. If you make a move without first talking out its every possible ramification with your fellow players, you can expect them to howl in protest. They'll want to mull over a long list of potential calamities that might rain down on them. You, as players, can often afford the time it takes to fuss. In a dungeon, time is usually on your side. You control the pace at which the party inches down corridors, maps every twist and turn, and knocks down each door. When confronted with a problem, you frequently have time to carefully weigh the risks of each likely solution. To fail to take advantage of this blessing is foolishness. Sure, if you dawdle too much, you can expect a wandering monster or two to clomp down the hallway and interrupt your deliberations. But you're prepared for them.

In a swashbuckling adventure, the DM controls the pace. The action rollicks along faster than you can roll a barrel of wine down a staircase. You might have a scant few hours before the villain marries the young maiden, executes the prince, or bombards the town with cannon fire. There's no time to stop and work out every last detail of your plan. You have to think of something *now* and do it yesterday. You'll never see D'Artagnan or Captain Blood pacing the floorboards for hours agonizing over the best course of action. They pick one plan that seems likely and get moving, confident that courage, quick thinking, and a noble heart will get them over any unanticipated obstacles.

Follow their example. Remember, your DM knows the rules of the genre, too! She'll penalize you for humming and hawing and give you a break when you take risks on the spur-of-the-moment. Don't make the mistake of assuming that the odds against you are as overwhelming as they might seem. The DM's job is to make things seem hopeless, while secretly providing you with one or more roads to dazzling victory. Be bold. Try plans so crazy they just might work. After all, the name of the game is derring-do, not derring-don't.

SWASHBUCKLER'S OPTION

Stirring Oration

With a successful Charisma check, the character can persuade a large group of people to take action, even at the risk of their own lives. At least once per adventure, a swashbuckler might need to rally the common people to rise up against an oppressive ruler or convince the old musketeers to don their feathered hats once again to avenge their honor against a traitorous noble. The group must already agree with the character's cause. He's not hypnotizing them into doing something they disagree with; he's giving them hope of success or persuading them that the cause is worth the sacrifice. On a successful check, the character can persuade up to 10 levels of NPCs per character level to agree to help in a daring, heroic plan.

2 The World Is On Your Side

The dungeon is your enemy. Everything in it is either out to kill you or looks like something that might be out to kill you. The more innocent an object looks, the more likely it is to conceal a trap. You triumph by making war with the dungeon: bashing down its doors, snuffing out its secrets one by one, and committing them to map parchment.

In a swashbuckling adventure, the world is on your side. The props you find around you are your secret weapons. The more innocent an object looks, the greater the surprise you'll score against your foes when you ingeniously use it against them.

Take that classic signpost of the swashbuckler: the chandelier. If you came across a chandelier in a dungeon, you'd know better than to swing on it. You wouldn't bother trying to use it to drop down on that pack of invading gnolls; you know your odds are better if you just wade in with your sword or mace and whale away at them. If you even tried such a thing, you'd probably find that the chains connecting it to the ceiling have been eaten away by corrosive slime or sawed at by some malign sprite.

If, on the other hand, your DM happens to off-handedly mention the presence of a chandelier as she describes the grand hall of the evil duke's estate, you can be sure that someone's meant to swing on it—and that this swinging will likely occur at a climactic moment. Who better to do the swinging than you? Count on a big result when you succeed. You might, for example, knock down every single one of the duke's men in a colossal domino effect.

(For extra points, remember that in the days before electric lighting, chandeliers were nothing more than gigantic, suspended candle-holders. To light the candles, servants would have to lower the chandelier to floor level with the aid of a rope connected to a pulley. If you're thinking in swashbuckling mode, you're ahead of us already—it's the pull-rope that you really ought to be swinging on.)

So when you're in a tight spot, when the bloodthirsty pirates have you cornered in the colonial governor's kitchen, look around for items that are waiting to help you. In swashbuckler mode, a found item almost always makes as effective a weapon as the cutlass in your scabbard or the dagger in your boot. Expect your DM to assign you a big bonus for flinging a handy meat cleaver at the lead pirate. Expect an even bigger one for lifting a roasting boar from its spit and hurling it at him. Anything that makes a big mess when it lands befuddles your foes, making them stand there cleaning stuff out of their eyes while you escape or seize a new advantage. Bags of flour or sand work splendidly for this purpose.

Scan the scene for something to jump up on: It's always worthwhile to fall on your foes from a height. Maybe you can clamber up on top of a big chest of drawers. In a swashbuckling game, combat is all about momentum. If you can hit somebody with a thrown object or make yourself into a speeding missile to knock your enemies about, your success is nearly assured. Again, your DM will alter the standard D&D® rules to reflect the different physical reality seen in the swashbuckler genre.

When creating a dungeon, the DM makes careful notes detailing the contents of each room. Let's say you happen to have forgotten to pack your 10-foot pole one particular morning. It's no use looking around pathetically in the hopes that your DM will feel sorry for you and tell you there just happens to be one leaning up against the nearest column. But in a swashbuckling game, she might expect you to help her out with the creative work. Instead of asking her if there's a hot poker in the fireplace, ready to substitute for your confiscated rapier, take the liberty and tell her it's there. Your description might go something like this: "Captain Crimson leaps back into the room and looks around for a makeshift weapon to use against the castellan. He sees a poker in the fireplace, grabs the cool end like a sword, and has at him!" So long as the object you suggest isn't completely beyond the realm of possibility—the governor isn't likely to have a cannon in his bedroom, or a pantry stocked with *rings of invulnerability*—the DM should happily incorporate it into the scene. If the DM thinks you've scored too great an advantage with your found object, she should remember that the sauce is the same for gander and goose. There's no reason why the castellan can't also look around and pick up a prop ideally suited for parrying hot poker blows.

Here's the key: The more exciting your use of the environment around you is, the more likely the DM is to not only allow it, but assign you a juicy bonus for adding to the fun.

SWASHBUCKLER'S OPTION

Panache

To opponents with lower Charisma scores, the character's sense of style is jaw-dropping. When using this ability, the player must make a Charisma check and describe an especially stylish or intimidating move taken in mid-fight. Examples of panache in action include:

- **Switching your sword from one hand to another in the course of a duel, saying that perhaps it's time you stopped using your off-hand.**
- **Using your rapier to deftly pop each brass button from the tunic of the sergeant's uniform.**
- **Ripping off the mask that conceals your true identity, only to reveal a second mask underneath.**
- **Reminding the villain of something humiliating he did when you were childhood friends.**

On a successful roll, the target suffers a penalty to his attack rolls. The penalty equals the difference between the character's and target's Charisma ratings. It lasts for the duration of the fight or until an ally of the target successfully uses panache against the character.

3 Panache Your Middle Name

Let's face it, when creating a character to plumb a dungeon's nooks and crannies, there's one ability score that always gets short shrift: Charisma. Sure, it's nice to dream of the followers you'll attract one day, but compared to the ability to dodge blows or shrug off incoming spells, being charming just doesn't seem all that useful. It's not as if you're going to invite the kobold king to a tea party before dispatching him.

In swashbuckling territory, though, Charisma is your hero's most important tool. Count on him to convince bloodthirsty pirates he's more use to them alive than dead, or to revive the battered morale of his beleaguered ship's crew. He won't be able to do this if he's a slope-browed, drooling mouth-breather with a Charisma score in the low single digits. He must speak eloquently, stirring the hearts of his allies and striking terror into the souls of his foes.

4 Keep Your Blade Sharp and Your Tongue Sharper

Wit is a crucial component of your Charisma-based arsenal. It's not enough to defeat a villain—you must prove yourself his master in the fine art of the cutting remark. Swashbuckling villains stand united in their resolute lack of a sense of humor, especially regarding their own faults. Your DM should reward you for wittiness above and beyond the call of duty. For example, each time you successfully infuriate a foe with a cutting remark, your DM might award you XP equal to 10% of the amount you'd get for defeating him outright.

5 Armor is for the Weak

In the swashbuckling era, no swordsman worthy of the name would think of sullying the fine, graceful line of his body in motion with the use of anything so gauche as armor. Helmets and breastplates are for lowly guards and comically cowardly pirates, not gallant heroes or suave villains. Your DM should give you some free armor protection to compensate for the unforgiving treatment that D&D rules mete out to unarmored combatants. Instead of the usual defensive adjustments to Armor Class for high Dexterity scores, use the following rules.

Fighters adjust their AC by –1 each time they go up a level priests adjust by –1 every two levels, and rogues at every three. These level increases no longer apply if the character reaches an AC of –10, not counting modifiers for magic items.

These adjustments go away the moment the character dons armor of any kind. He can still use magical items that improve his AC, benefit from spells that do so, and so on.

6 Gentlemen Prefer Rapiers

Just as you never see a pirate in plate armor, you're not likely to see him pounding across a deck swinging a great big mace or two-handed sword. Grace and speed, not sheer power, win the day in the swashbuckler genre. Accordingly, all medium-sized weapons impose a –3 penalty on your chance to hit. Large weapons impose a –6 penalty. The cutlass and rapier are exempt from these penalties.

7 Pay Heed to the Heart

Dungeon adventurers avoid love affairs like they do level-draining undead. They fear that their DMs will use their loved ones against them, having them continually threatened by villains and monsters. They don't want such distractions keeping them from their true destiny as looters of the Underdark.

In a swashbuckling campaign, you're not going to enjoy the luxury of a cold, cold heart. Swashbuckling is as much about romance as it is about adventure. Your swashbuckling hero (or heroine) should expect, soon after play begins, to find himself enthralled by a pure, devoted, and unconsummated love. The object of his affections will probably be as honorable and worthy as he is; if so, he'll be kept from his inamorata by misunderstandings, physical distance, imprisonment, or simply the necessity of his mission. Sometimes, though, the heart is the hero's downfall, as he succumbs to the charms of a seductress with sinister secrets, like Lady de Winter of *The Three Musketeers*. In these cases, he must deliver tragic justice to a woman a part of him can't help but love.

Your DM should award you experience points for displaying proper romanticism. You might get 100 XP per level for each scene in which your character's tormented love subplot is advanced. If your love affair adds significant complications to your completion of a session's story goals, you gain a 20% bonus on other XP gained that session.

SWASHBUCKLER'S OPTION

Strategic Flirting

With a successful Charisma check, the character can wring favors from newly encountered members of the opposite sex simply by virtue of his (or her) dazzling smile and breathtaking good looks. Besotted NPCs might provide important information, help a character escape confinement, or simply stand there in lovesick distraction while another member of the character's party does something sneaky. The NPC's loss of composure lasts just long enough for the character to get one benefit from his romantic allure. After that, his target might still find the character attractive, but she regains her sense of perspective about him. Strategic flirting doesn't work if the target knows the character by reputation and has a strong negative opinion of him.

8 Chivalry to the Point of Idiocy

The swashbuckling hero is bound by a moral code as strict as any paladin's. If he's a musketeer, he must unfailingly risk his life to protect the royal family from the many intrigues and villains seeking to undermine the throne. This duty takes precedence over all other concerns, from his own safety to the progress of the love affair mentioned above. As a secondary oath, he swears absolute loyalty to all of his comrades, agreeing to unquestioningly lay down his life for a brother musketeer should the need arise. If a mission requires him to withhold information from his true love, making her think he's abandoned her, so be it.

The pirate hero curls his lip in disgust at the of the common buccaneer. Most pirates are nothing more than seaworthy savages. When they attack a town or take over another vessel, they gleefully slaughter everyone on board—except

for the slaves. They'll be subjected to the same cruel treatment they got from their original captors, eventually being sold like any other commodity. Women unlucky enough to be captured face the proverbial fate worse than death.

But the pirate hero remains a man of honor. He plunders, to be sure, but kills as few rival sailors as possible. He restricts his targets to other ships; to subject a city to cannon-fire is to risk the lives of too many women and children. He'd sooner die than allow the purity of a young maiden to be sullied.

Your DM should award you 100–500 XP each time your sense of gallantry makes it harder to fulfill a story goal or forces you to take additional risk.

9 It's Getting Back Out Again That's Tricky

There comes a time in every swashbuckler's life when the best plan requires him to infiltrate his enemy's estate or fortress. He might need to rescue a hostage, seize an incriminating document, or avert bloodshed by capturing his foe. Disregard any claims you hear about the stronghold's impregnability. There's *always* a way in. The time-honored technique is to sneak in under false pretenses, claiming to be someone who legitimately belongs inside. In the dark of night, you might need nothing more than a floppy hat pulled over your face to pass the requisite gauntlet of guards. However, sometimes stronger measures are called for, and you'll need to go so far as to don a fake moustache. Any self-respecting hero ought to be able to conceal his identity. Accordingly, in a swashbuckling campaign, the Disguise non-weapon proficiency is no longer the sole preserve of the rogue; it moves to the General category.

10 The Turnkey Always Slips Up

Dungeon-bashing characters hate to be captured and imprisoned. It means they'll be stripped of their hard-earned armor, weapons, and magical items. Swashbucklers, on the other hand, must expect imprisonment on a regular basis. They don't rely on armor and can easily replace cutlasses and rapiers. In a prison cell, they meet the villains face to face. The bad guys tell them the details of their sinister plots, confident that the heroes will never escape their clutches. Swashbucklers prove their heroism by withstanding torture and refusing to betray their comrades. Somehow, the guards always seem to slip up, giving the heroes a chance to overpower them or trick them out of their keys. And when they do make a break for it, they always seem to find any important items of personal property conveniently stashed for them on the way to the exit. You should expect XP awards for gaining clues while imprisoned, for retaining your composure under torture, and for cleverly escaping. Each award should fall in the 100–500 XP range.

SWASHBUCKLER'S OPTION

Wit

The hero has mastered the art of the clever, usually insulting, remark and can use it against an enemy, leaving the foe sputtering with uncontrolled rage. After a successful Charisma check, the target suffers a –2 penalty to all attack rolls and checks for 1d6 rounds. The effect is not cumulative over multiple successes, and all penalties are cancelled if someone successfully employs wit against the hero. The hero can use it once per round; it does not cost an action. The hero can employ wit in social situations, using verbal sophistication to convince aristocrats that the hero belongs in their company. The hero can also use it on allies to defuse tense situations, breaking up potential mutinies with friendly jests.

11 Sovereigns and Pieces of Eight

Musketeers care more about honor and service to their king than mere riches. To them, gold is only a thing to spend on food, drink, and roistering. If your campaign draws inspiration from *The Three Musketeers*, don't expect to find treasure all over the place. Your characters turn up their noses at chances for casual looting. They get their equipment from the king's armory, their horses from his livery, and so on.

Pirates, of course, live for treasure. However, the honorable swashbuckler finds only a hollow victory in the accumulation of chests of gold and purses filled with pearls. He robs in the name of his country, to deprive enemy powers of money flowing into their coffers from the New World. He might also steal to please his men, thinking only of the love he left behind when fate forced him into the pirate's life.

In either case, your DM should award you XP when you turn down riches in the pursuit of a noble cause.

12 Love Life, and Life Will Love You Back

Above all, swashbuckling characters maintain an attitude of *joie de vivre*: They don't let the dangers of their existence oppress them. They love life, from its simple pleasures to the finest flights of poetry. They do so precisely because they know they might die tomorrow. Pleasures exist to be savored. Swashbucklers eat, drink, and love with gusto. They don't worry about the effect of a big meal on their ability to fend off a sudden attack or penalties to their hit rolls due to drunkenness. To reflect this, your DM should never penalize your character for his fleshly indulgences. When sudden danger strikes, any swashbuckler worthy of the name can immediately shake off the effects of a wine bottle or cask of ale. He can leap from the bed of a serving lass, snatch up his rapier, and fend off a squad of the duke's men clad only in a night shirt and a smile. Expect extra XP rewards for risks taken in the name of pleasure.

If you check out any of freelance designer Robin D. Laws' current or upcoming efforts, like Hero Wars *(Issaries Inc.)*, or his novel The Rough and the Smooth *(Atlas), he promises that he will crash through a stained-glass window, both flintlocks blazing, and rescue you, should you ever be held prisoner by a sinister abbot or foul-breathed pirate captain.*

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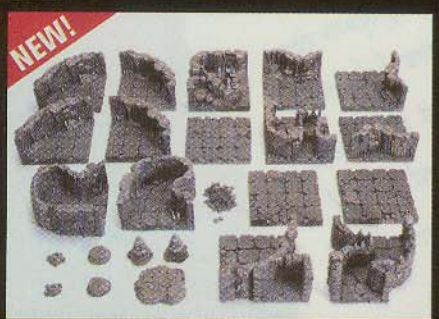

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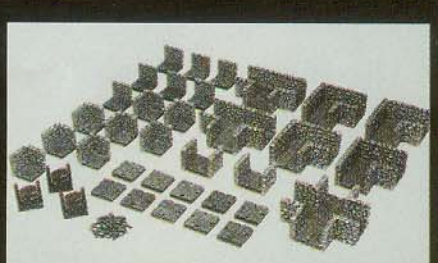

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Van Richten's Legacy

Wicked Garden

by Owen K.C. Stephens

As we strive to learn the nuances of running uncle Rudolph's shop, Lauric and I continue to run into puzzling little mysteries. There are numerous mementos throughout the shop that baffle us completely. In particular Uncle Rudolph collected a number of herbs I do not recognize, including a garden of mushrooms in the cellar. Without knowing what these herbs are, it is impossible to know how to handle them properly. Given the possible dangers such things might represent, we dare not remain uninformed to the nature of the many oddities in the shop.

I recall seeing notes on rare herbs among the papers we found locked away. Perhaps they will shed some light on the smaller mysteries Uncle Rudolph left us, if not the greater riddle of his own disappearance. Since he never seemed to sell even the more innocuous of these plants to strangers, we will proceed with caution in our own experiments.

From the Journal of Gennifer Foxgrove-Weathermay

Illustrated by Rob Alexander

Van Richten's Herbal Notes

Even before Rudolph Van Richten's life took the tragic turn that eventually made him the Demiplane of Dread's foremost expert on the paranatural, he was a knowledgeable herbalist. Although his later studies consumed much of his time, Van Richten never passed up an opportunity to study plants with unusual properties. As a result, he gained a great deal of information that he dared not trust to the general populace. Gennifer Foxgrove-Weathermay found and read one of the journals in which he had recorded this information. Although she noticed it was marked as number two of three, she never found Van Richten's other secret herbal journals. In fact, Van Richten lost them during a hazardous river crossing in Nova Vaasa.

The remaining herbal journal consists of ten sheets of well-waxed vellum kept loose in a leather case marked with the initials "RVR." Originally, each sheet contained information about two dangerous magical herbs, but four of the pages are too badly damaged by water to be legible. Details of the twelve herbs described on the undamaged pages are presented here. Each description is followed by several options, allowing the DM to choose which effect best suits the campaign. In addition to these, a DM can also choose to have the item simply work exactly as described—or perhaps not even work at all.

Adder's Tongue

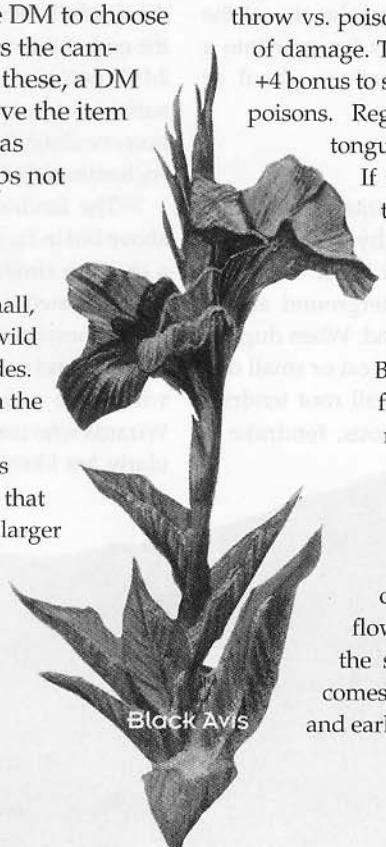
Adder's Tongue is a small, leafy plant that grows wild in valleys and on hillsides. It derives its name from the long, forked leaves that cover the plant. Adder's tongue is small enough that it's often hidden under larger plants, making it hard to find. In the spring however, the plant bristles with yellow and orange flower blossoms.

Van Richten bought some adder's tongue in Borca from a roving peddler who claimed it was a useful preventative against poisoning. Unfortunately, Van Richten was arrested shortly thereafter, as the plant is an illegal narcotic in that domain, believed to cause madness. After a hefty "contribution" persuaded the police force to forget having seen him with the plant, Dr. Van Richten clandestinely gathered as much of the herb as possible. He brought them back to his shop, but none of his efforts to grow more of the plants from cuttings were successful. Gennifer and Laurie have decided to renew those efforts.

➢Anyone ingesting a dose of adder's tongue receives a +4 bonus to saving throw vs. poison for 1d6 hours. There are no narcotic properties to the plant, nor are there any side effects from use. The madness is nothing more than a rumor started by local noblewoman Ivana Boritsi to ensure use of the plant never becomes widespread.

➢The plant actually speeds poisons through the body, and anyone imbibing a dose suffers a –4 penalty to all saving throws vs. poison for 1d6 hours. Its supposed use against poison and all side effects are nothing more than rumor.

➢Adder's tongue is useful against poisons but is itself poisonous. Anyone using it must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or suffer 5d6 points of damage. The plant then grants a +4 bonus to saving throws vs. other poisons. Regular use of adder's tongue can cause madness. If the herb is used more than once in a month, the user must make a Madness check.



Black Avis

Black Avis

Black avis is a tall, dark flower that somewhat resembles a large, lopsided lily. Its large blossom varies in color from black to a dark blue or rarely charcoal. Unlike most flowers, which sprout in the spring, the black avis comes into bloom in late fall and early winter.

This unusual cycle of life was enough to interest Dr. Van Richten. He learned to use the herb to concoct potions that have a calming effect and can even ease the suffering of the mentally ill. Laurie and Gennifer have successfully grown several of these plants and keep them in Van Richten's old laboratory. Although they aren't sure why their uncle kept knowledge of black avis a secret, they are being cautious with it themselves and sell it only rarely.

Although Van Richten first took note of the plant in the domain of Invidia, it is now most commonly found in Sithicus.

➢An herbalist can make a potion out of black avis that negates both mundane and magical fear and depression for 2d6 rounds. It also has a 25% chance of temporarily curing most mental disorders, although this effect lasts only 1d6 hours, and each successive use on the same subject reduces this roll by 1 hour.

➢In addition to the powers above, a potion of black avis grants anyone under the effects of *charm* spells a new saving throw vs. spell to break the magic hold.

➢A potion brewed from black avis negates fear, depression, and madness as above but actually makes the imbiber more vulnerable to *charm* magics, imposing a –4 penalty to such saving throws for 1d6 hours.

Churchsteeple

Churchsteeple is a small bush found mostly in heavily wooded areas such as those found in the domains of Falkovnia, Invidia, Kartakass, and Verbrek. Churchsteeple appears to be no more than an uninteresting shrub when rooted. Once removed from soil, the single, the straight, white root of the churchsteeple becomes visible. It is from the tower-like appearance of this unusual root that the plant acquired its name.

Dr. Van Richten found churchsteeple mentioned in an ancient tome he was researching for clues on fighting the undead. According to that volume, the root of the churchsteeple provides whoever carries it protection against creatures and spells of evil. The tome also warned that most evil creatures can smell a churchsteeple root miles away and often track that scent to its source. Realizing that safety in the lands of Ravenloft often has more to do with

stealth and flight from danger than simple protection, Van Richten has never tested the powers of churchsteeple root.

Laurie has grown several churchsteeple bushes in a small garden outside the shop. She and Gennifer have both taken to carrying some of the plant with them whenever they go out.

➢A fresh churchsteeple root acts as a *protection from evil* spell for anyone who carries it. The root remains fresh for 2d4 days, after which it is useless. Any creature with good olfactory sense can smell a churchsteeple root at twice the range it can smell a human.

➢A fresh churchsteeple root acts as a *protection from evil, 10' radius spell* for 2d4 days. However, the smell of such a root can be detected by any werecreature or corporeal undead at a range of 20 miles.

➢Churchsteeple root prevents anyone carrying it from becoming a werecreature or vampire and provides a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. Necromantic spells. Unfortunately, its use within a domain is immediately detected by the darklord of that realm. Most darklords wish to investigate those who believe they have need of such protection.

Dead Man's Tears

Dead man's tears are small, lush plants with teardrop-shaped leaves. They grow mostly in burial grounds on the earthen graves of those long-dead. The plants are often found in large numbers in abandoned cemeteries, but only a few grow in an active burial ground. None of the plants can be found in an area heavily infested with undead.

Dr. Van Richten was introduced to this herb by a fellow scholar, Vincent Karadent, who claimed to use it in his dangerous studies. The herb supposedly gave Karadent the appearance of an undead creature and allowed him to study other undead closely without risk. Appalled, Van Richten attempted to convince his colleague to abandon this practice, but his journal sadly notes his pleas fell on deaf ears. Vincent Karadent disappeared a few weeks after showing Van Richten this herb. Van Richten gathered and preserved a fair number of these plants, but he never tried to use them. Laurie has been unable to grow any new plants from these samples and is unlikely to continue her efforts.

➢Those who consume the leaves of dead man's tears undergo a remarkable transformation. Their skin turns a pale white, their body temperatures drop, and their hearts beat so slowly as to be almost undetectable even by a thorough examination. The target also gains enhanced Strength, as if the recipient of a *strength* spell. The change lasts for 1d3 days and is close enough to an undead condition to fool simple undead such as zombies and skeletons. Intelligent undead might mistake someone in this state for an undead at a distance, but they are unlikely to be fooled upon close examination.

➢Dead man's tears work as above, but those using dead man's tears place a considerable strain on both body and mind. Each use requires a System Shock roll, with failure indicating the permanent loss of one point of Constitution. A character whose Con drops below five is 50% likely to actually become a zombie. Use of the herb also forces a character to make a Madness check.

➢Occasional use of dead man's tears works as above, but regular use of the herb slowly transforms the user into a genuine undead, usually a ghoul or zombie.

Fendrake root

Fendrake root is a parasitic herb that attaches itself to healthy tree roots and draws nutrients from them. Fendrake root grows fully underground and is therefore difficult to find. When dug up, a fendrake resembles a cat or small dog made of bark and small root tendrils. Although not poisonous, fendrake is foul tasting and of no normal herbal value.

Some pigs can be trained to find fendrake by scent. Failing that, a skilled forester might be able to find fendrake by seeking out trees that seem to be dying for no particular reason. Digging near the base of such a tree has a small chance of revealing a fendrake root.

Dr. Van Richten was first introduced to fendrake root by Shauten the wizard, who kept some handy at all times. Shauten explained that it is possible to use the *find familiar* spell (and a drop of the caster's blood) to temporarily animate the fendrake root into a creature similar to a homonculous. A fendrake-homonculous can't fly and lasts for only a month but, despite these limitations, is occasionally a useful tool. Although he never saw a fendrake-homonculous in use, Van Richten recorded all the details of the herb Shauten offered. There is no fendrake within the shop, and the Wethermay twins see no point in acquiring any.

➢If a wizard casts a *find familiar* spell on a fendrake root and includes a drop of his own blood in the material components, the root is temporarily enchanted to act as a homonculous familiar (see the *Monstrous Manual*™ tome) for the wizard. The fendrake-homonculous lasts only one month and lacks the flight and poison abilities of a true homonculous. If the fendrake-homonculous dies before the end of the month, the wizard suffers 2d10 points of damage. The wizard suffers no damage when the fendrake-homonculous "dies" at the end of the enchantment's duration.

➢The fendrake can be animated as above but in fact it is being possessed by a creature similar to an imp. Although the animated fendrake still acts as a lesser homonculous, it is actually an evil creature, and using it requires the casting wizards to make Dark Powers checks. Wizards who use animated fendrake regularly are likely to eventually summon

Midnight Lace

an imp familiar who remains permanently, killing any other familiars the wizards have. This causes another Dark Powers check and is often the beginning of the end for those wizards.

➢Fendrake root can be animated as above, but 2,000 gp worth of herbs and oils are required, as well as the spells *find familiar, mirror image, monster summoning I,* and *charm monster.*

Midnight Lace

Midnight lace is a delicate moss found mostly on rock-lined riverbeds. It is most common in Nova Vaasa and Lamordia. The moss is a pale greenish color and grows in thin sheets on damp rock. Natural predators such as wolves and great cats tend to avoid patches of midnight lace, making areas covered with it popular watering spots for deer and other herbivores.

Dr. Van Richten found a large amount of midnight lace on the corpse of young hunter in Valachan. The body had obviously been clawed viciously by great cats, but oddly there were very few bite marks on the body. Van Richten made inquiries regarding the dead man and learned he had intended to slay a rogue panther that had killed his sister. The midnight lace was supposed to protect him from the creature's mate, as predators hate the herb's scent.

Further research into the moss convinced Van Richten it does possess a scent that most carnivores dislike, but it is not strong enough to prevent them from attacking if provoked. He suspected it would be possible to preserve the herb in a way that would increase its usefulness as a repellent, but he never had time to research the question properly. Gennifer has decided to take up this research herself.

➢Midnight lace has only a mild effect on most predators, making random encounters with carnivores unlikely while it is carried. However, nosferatu vampires find the scent repulsive and avoid it strongly. If a nosferatu vampire attempts to feed on a character carrying midnight lace, it must make a saving throw vs. poison or be nauseated so intensely that it cannot feed for 1d13 days.

➢Although midnight lace is only a mild repellent, the flesh of anyone ingesting the moss gains a bitter flavor for 2d6 hours, making the individual too distasteful for any creature to bite him. Creatures of animal intelligence or less will not bite a character under the effects of this moss more than once . More intelligent attackers can do so if they make a successful saving throw vs. poison after each bite.

➢Midnight lace is a strong repellent for most predators, greatly reducing chances of random encounters with them and causing any attacks made by such creatures to suffer a –2 attack penalty. Cats of all types, however, are actually attracted by the scent, and chances of random encounters with them are doubled.

Mist Weed

The rare plant known as mist weed can be found only in misty bogs and marshes, and near the misty borders of the Demiplane of Dread. Even in these areas, the weed is uncommon. Someone searching for it can expect to spend several days in the hunt. It is a simple-looking herb, growing in long grasslike tufts, usually medium to dark gray.

Folklore attributes many powers to mist weed, including healing powers against disease and safety from the dangers and threats often associated with the mists of Ravenloft. Many commoners seek the weed and place it in a pouch worn on the chest or near the head as a kind of goodluck token. The more knowledgeable denizens of Ravenloft scoff at these simple charms as nothing more than peasant superstition.

Dr. Van Richten knew that most superstitions are rooted in fact and spent some time studying mist weed. He concluded that the herb might act as a protection against various magical mists, but it loses its potency too quickly to be of much long-term use.

➢Mist weed is a magical herb that can reduce the power of mist- and fog-based spells. A bag filled with fresh mist weed grants its wearer a +4 bonus to saving throws vs. vapor-based spells such as *stinking cloud* and grants a saving throw at –4 to resist misty spells that normally don't allow a save, such as *solid fog* and *cloudkill.* However, the herbs retain this property for only 1d3 weeks after being cut. Mist weed has no power over the mysterious mists of Ravenloft itself.

➢Mist weed produces a small amount of fresh air while it is living. If some fresh-cut mist weed is kept near a character's head, she receives a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. mundane poisonous gasses. Once cut, the herb dies within 1d4 days and ceases to produce the bonus. It has no use against magic vapors of any kind.

➢The herb actually attracts the mists of the Demiplane of Dread. Anyone wearing a pouch of mist weed has a 5% chance each night of being engulfed by the mists and moved randomly to some other point in the demiplane, usually to one of the core domains. However, this has no effect on mists that close the borders of various domains.

Red Cap

Red caps are rare mushrooms, named for the crimson colored splotches found on each fungi's top. They need plenty of moisture and just a little light to grow well and are usually found in deep woods or cave-riddled hills near large rivers. Each red cap stands five to seven inches tall and has a cap of roughly the same diameter. Only the cap itself has any value; the stem of the mushroom is useless and mildly poisonous.

Van Richten first ran into red cap mushrooms in Hazlan, where they were being used by a small group of apprentice wizards. The apprentices claimed the fungi allowed them to cast spells normally restricted to more powerful wizards. They also believed that they could even give non-spellcasters the power to cast simple spells.

Mist Weed

Van Richten took samples of the mushrooms and decided to grow some in his basement, intending to eventually test their supposed properties. Although he successfully transplanted some of the fungi to his basement, he did not have time to perform any tests before his disappearance. Gennifer and Laurie have harvested and preserved some of the mushrooms but have not yet used any.

➢One dose of red cap grants wizards increased magic ability for 1d4 hours, allowing them to cast spells as if two levels higher. It has no effect on non-spellcasters. It is also poisonous, requiring the ingester to make a saving throw vs. poison. If the saving throw failes, the imbiber loses one point of both Intelligence and Constitution permanently.

➢Red cap acts much like a *potion of delusion*, causing the user to believe he has gained great spellcasting ability. The user continues to believe this for 1d4 hours after taking the red cap even in the face of strong contradictory evidence and must make a saving throw vs. spells with a –4 penalty to realize the truth at the end of this time.

➢Red cap does increase wizardly spellcasting ability for 1d6 hours and can grant such ability even to non-wizards for 1d4 hours. Initially this power is equal to one wizard level per red cap imbibed, although spells must be learned normally to be cast. However, each time a creature uses red cap, he needs one more mushroom to gain the same level of power. Thus when using red cap for the fourth time, a creature would need five mushrooms just to gain one boost in casting level. Additionally, spells cast while under the influence of red cap puts a terrible strain on the casters' bodies, causing them to age one year.

Scarab Caps

Scarab caps are rare mushrooms that grow mostly in deserts and plains, often next to cacti or prairie shrubs. The fungi are short and hard to spot, having al-most no stems and very small caps. The caps are covered in dark lines, causing them to vaguely resemble a scarab. Usually no more than one or two scarab cap mushrooms are found in a given locale.

Van Richten first found mention of scarab caps while investigating (and eventually battling) a mummy in eastern Darkon, near Nevucher Springs. The undead creature's robes were covered in ancient writings that, once deciphered, made mention of a fungus that could prevent death by granting a deathless trance to whoever consumed it.

Later, while visiting Har'Akir, Dr. Van Richten actually found a few scarab cap mushrooms. Although dubious of their possible use, Van Richten collected them for further study. His notes mention that he used one scarab cap in a desperate situation and that they seem to have preserved a mortally wounded colleague in a trance for several days. One well-preserved scarab cap was found with the journal and has been carefully stored by Gennifer Foxgrove-Weathermay.

➢A character who has eaten a scarab cap must make a saving throw vs. death magic at a –2 penalty. If the saving throw fails, the character falls into a coma for 2d4 days. During this time, the character doesn't suffer from any poisons in his system and need not eat or drink. If the saving throw is successful, the character feels no effect unless she dies within the next 24 hours.

If the character is killed within a day of eating the mushroom, she is allowed to make another saving throw vs. death magic at a –2 penalty. If this roll fails, the character is dead. If the saving throw is successful however, the character is placed in a trance hovering just short of death. She remains in this trance for 1d6 days. During this time, a Healing check at –4 or a *heal* spell can restore her to full life. If the character does not receive aid before her trance ends, she dies normally.

➢As above, but characters who fail to receive aid before the trance ends are 50% likely to become undead (a zombie 50% of the time, a ghoul 25%, a wight 15%, and a ghost 10%).

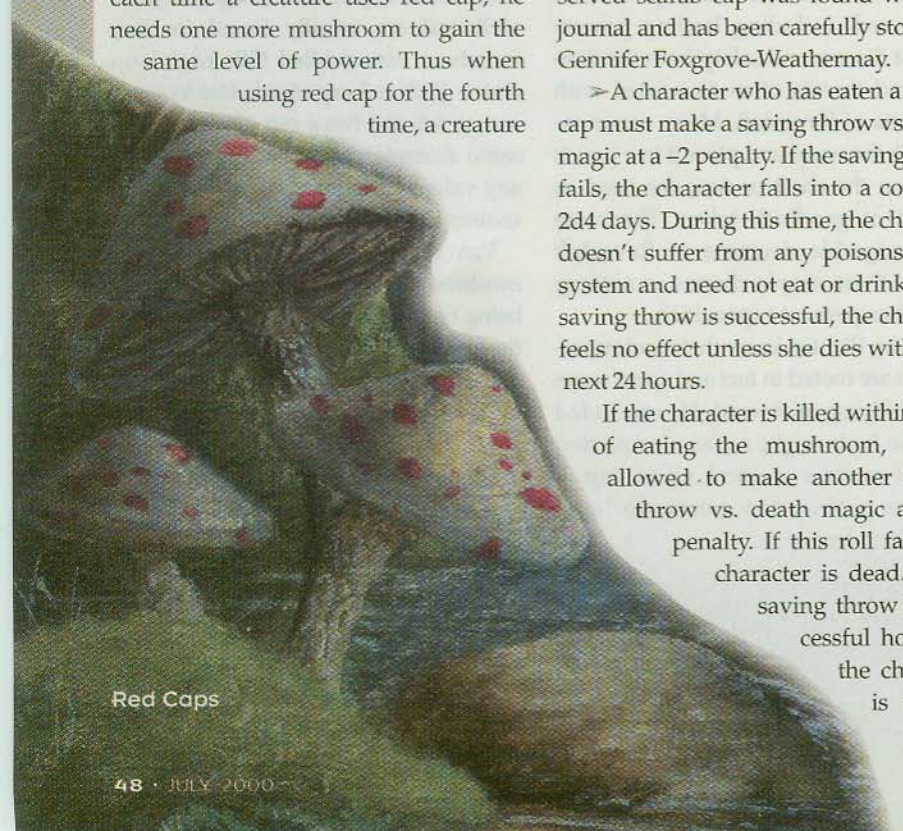
➢A character who eats a scarab cap must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die. If the saving throw is successful, the character's metabolism is greatly slowed for 2d4 days. The character eats only half her normal amount of food, sleeps 50% longer, and loses 1d6 points of Dexterity. However, the character is more resilient to poisons, receiving a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. poison and having double the normal onset time before being affected by them.

Vistani's Bells

Vistani's bells are small, blue, bell-shaped flowers that grow on vines. They are most often found clinging to the walls of ancient stone buildings and ruins. The herb is most commonly found climbing neglected churches in Barovia. Unlike other flowers, vistani's bells remain in bloom year-round, regardless of the weather.

Van Richten made several visits to Barovia, where he was intrigued by this eternally blooming flower. He spoke to locals regarding the plant and gathered several rumors. The Barovians believe the flower is used by the Vistani to brew teas that can induce prophetic trances. Van Richten made several efforts to confirm this, but unsurprisingly he found no Vistani willing to discuss the matter.

Van Richten stocked a large supply of vistani's bells in his shop and managed to confirm some of the herb's properties. It is certainly possible to make a tea from the flower's petals, a brew that induces a deep sleep and vivid dreams. But he found no evidence to suggest the dreams were in any way precognitive. He did occasionally use the tea for customers who had difficulty sleeping or suffered terrible nightmares. Gennifer is not yet comfortable with the idea of prescribing the herb to customers.



Red Caps

➢ The tea made from vistani's bells induces a deep sleep filled with wild but pleasant dreams, even for victims of the neverending nightmares spell (Domains of Dread) or similar magics. It can be used for prophecy to achieve this effect but only the Vistani know how, and they are unlikely to share the secret with outsiders.

➢ Vistani's bells can be made into a tea that causes sleep as above but can also be eaten directly. In this stronger form the petals are dangerous, placing the imbiber into a trance for 1d6 days. Characters unable to make allowances for going so long without food and water must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation each day after the first. Every failed saving throw indicates the character has lost 1d4 points of Constitution. If the character reaches a Constitution of zero, he dies. While within this trance, the character has prophetic dreams regarding a single question foremost in his mind.

➢ Vistani's bells are mildly useful as an aid to sleep but their true use lies in aiding divination magics. Although unable to induce precognitive dreams, the flowers do cause any Divination spell cast with them as an added material component to be more effective. Such spells acting as if they had been cast by a spellcaster 2d6 levels higher.

Willow Wisps

Willow wisps are small glowing fungi that grow on weeping willows and similar plants. When a breeze stirs the willow, the glowing light can sometimes be mistaken for a will-o-wisp or ghost lights. No more than 1d2+1 willow wisps grow on a given tree, and generally only 1d4 trees in a grove are affected with this growth. The fungus is somewhat more common in the domain of Forlorn, with 2d4 willow wisps on each tree and as many as 2d6 trees in each grove affected.

An unknown individual sent Van Richten a jar of salve made from willow wisp and suggested it would be useful for nighttime research. Van Richten did some research regarding the fungus the paste was made from and used it on one or two occasions, but he found that the concoction made his eyes sting. Gennifer and Laurie have not had the time to look into the salve's uses themselves.

➢ Willow wisps can be crushed and made into a paste. If a character covers his eyes with the paste, her nightvision is equal to that of a cat's for 2d4 hours. During this time, she suffers only half the normal penalties for darkness. However the paste is mildly luminous, causing anyone using it to have glowing, ghastly eyes for the duration of its effect. One in every ten people is allergic to the herb and suffers painful itching in his eyes when using it. This is sufficiently distracting to cause a –1 penalty to all actions while using the salve.

➢ The paste works as above, but it can be dangerous. Each subsequent use of the paste within thirty days forces the user to make a saving throw vs. poison or go blind. This blindness lasts until cured by someone making both Herbalism and Healing proficiency checks at a –4 penalty each or a *cure blindness* spell is used.

➢ Willow wisp paste has only a mild effect on nightsight, reducing penalties for darkness by one. It does, however, allow its user to see invisible ghosts or similar spirits for 1d6 hours.

Wilting Roeby

Wilting roeby is a small bushy plant usually found in forests, woodlands and marshes. Every spring it produces groups of small, fragrant purple flowers (except in Borca, where the flowers are blue). The flowers of a wilting roeby can often be found to have turned brown and always die very early in the season. Local wisdom claims this is because the wilting roeby is a fragile plant that sometimes wilts for no reason at all.

Upon studying wilting roeby on the border between the domains of Keening and Tempest, Van Richten concluded that the truth regarding the wilting roebies is in fact more sinister: The plant is very sensitive to the evil magics that cling to undead in all forms, and the flowers die within a few hours of being in close proximity of any undead. More powerful undead wither the flowers of a wilting roeby at a greater range, usually equal to 5 feet per Hit Die of the undead. A picked set of wilting roeby remains fresh for a week if kept free of undead contact and can be carried to act as a warning to the presence of undead. The effect of an undead's presence won't be obvious for 1d6 hours, so the flower can be used only as a general warning. It is impossible to know if a particular creature has killed the flowers.

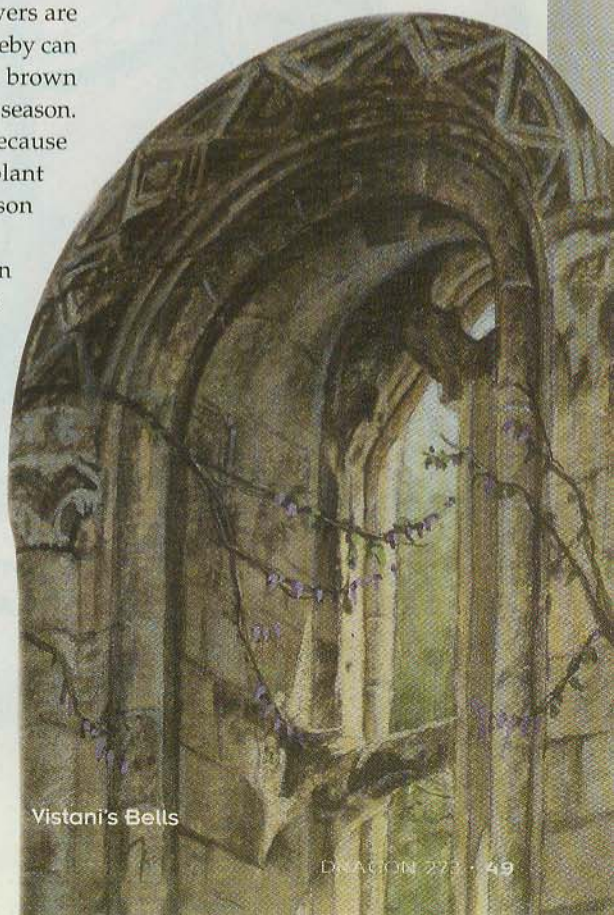
Laurie and Gennifer have potted a few wilting roeby bushes and keep them near the door to their shop and by most of the windows.

➢ Wilting roeby shrivels only near corporeal undead, so it doesn't warn of the presence of ghosts or specters.

➢ The flowers of the wilting roeby die when near any undead, as well as when exposed to any Necromantic or cold-based magic. They also have a 5% chance each week of dying for no reason.

➢ Although it takes several hours for a wilting roeby to die after being near most undead, the direct touch of a vampire, mummy, or lich kills it immediately, causing its flower to wilt within minutes.

Owen Stephens is a regular contributor to DRAGON® MAGAZINE *and sometimes visitor to the* Demiplane of Dread, *mostly when he's sleeping. He lives in Norman, Oklahoma with his lovely wife Lj, who's also the president of his fan club.*

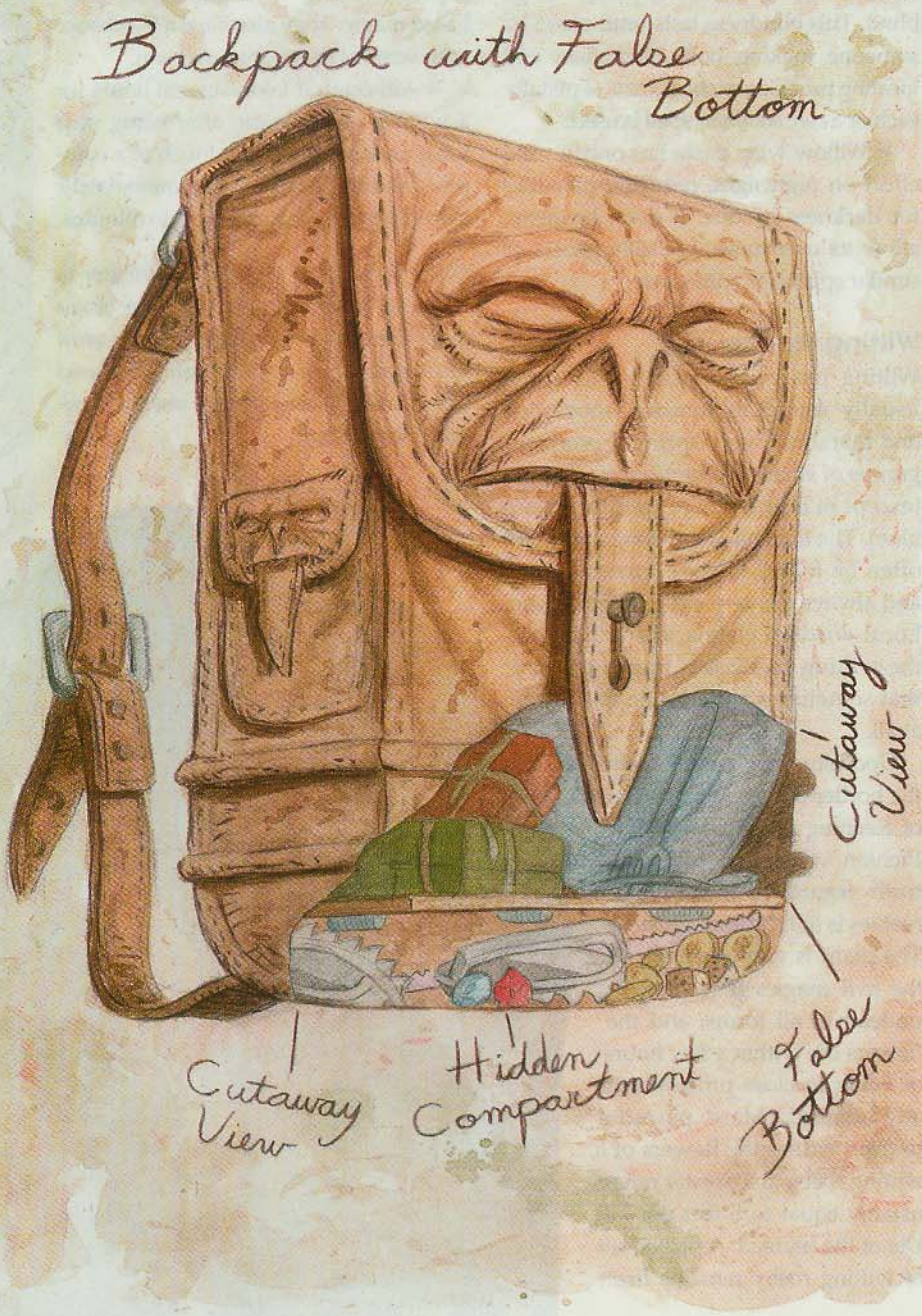


Vistani's Bells

Something Up Your Sleeve

New equipment for AD&D® Thieves

by Gregory W. Detwiler
illustrated by David Day



Players always appreciate new gear for their characters. Considering their abilities, rogues should have the very broadest selection of specialty tools. Accordingly, here is a collection of new equipment to add to your rogues' repertoire.

Alpenstock

This implement is a large cane with a hooked blade at one end and a spike on the other. The blade and spike act as a *horseman's pick –1* and *spear –1* respectively, but the main use of the alpenstock is for climbing steep slopes, such as some castle walls (particularly the earthen-walled motte-and bailey castles). It is also suitable for mountain-climbing, since that was its original function. It provides a +10% bonus to Climb Walls checks on any cracked, rough, or ice wall surface; see Chapter 14 of the *Player's Handbook* for more on climbing.

Backpack With False Bottom

Thieves tend to serve as the party's scouts on dungeon-delving quests, so they are often the first to enter the enemys treasure chamber. Such boldness and daring deserves a special reward, meaning an extra share of the treasure, but the thief's greedy and ungrateful comrades might not agree to such an arrangement. A backpack with a false bottom, however, ensures that the daring work of scouts in a dungeon will always bring with it the extra compensation it deserves.

Boat, Folding

Shaped like a wooden chest, this device is really a collapsible one-man boat that can be quite useful for crossing moats. It takes about 30 minutes to assemble.

Bombs, Flash

These alchemical masterpieces are hollow pots filled with a special powder that explodes with a loud noise and brilliant flash of light when coming into contact with the open air. (The mixture is dumped into the pots while still hot and then sealed up, as the effect takes place only after it's cooled off.) To blind an enemy or merely to create a diversion, dash one of these bombs against the floor or some other hard surface, making certain to look away. The blinding effect lasts for 1 round to those who fail a saving throw vs. breath weapon.

Brush, Small

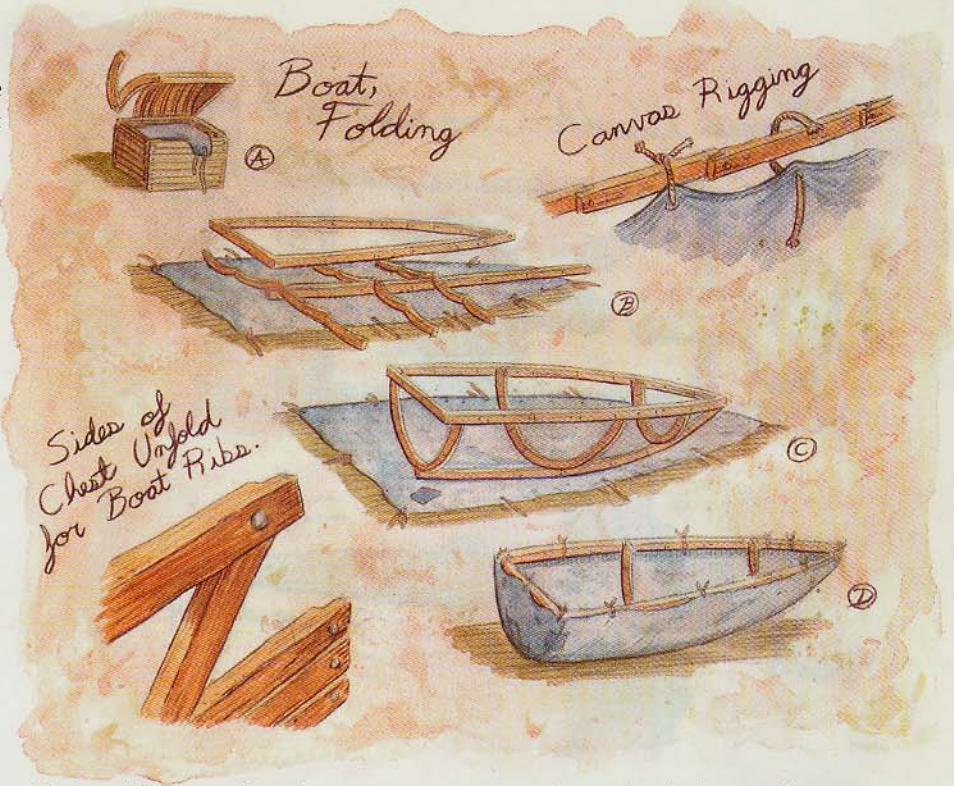
One nasty thing about walking on snow, sand, or dusty ground—or a dust-covered dungeon floor—is that even an invisible thief tends to leave tracks. If a thief doesn't want passersby to know he's been around, particularly if the area has regular patrols, he should take a brush along to sweep out his tracks as soon as they are made.

Catapult, Hand

This is a miniature catapult several feet long. Although it can be used as a missile weapon (ROF 1/3; Range 20/40/60; Damage 1d6 against opponents of all sizes), its main use is to hurl grappling hooks up to the tops of walls, cliff ledges, and so forth. Equipped with a firing cup of metal that does not burn, it can also be used to hurl incendiary missiles at a building or other target, either as a diversion or part of a major attack. It has one use per fueling and can be refueled for 75 gp.

Clay, Soft

This cheap and simple substance is a smuggler's dream. Mold or smear some over a gemstone (the price given below is for the amount needed to completely cover a single gem), bake it in the fire until it's hard, and the result appears to be either a sling round or an ordinary-looking stone of no particular value.



Fortunately, many characters carry stones and other seemingly useless items in their pockets. Thus, one can carry a fortune in precious stones right under the noses of other thieves or corrupt guards and officials.

Clogs, Wooden

These are high wooden clogs worn on the feet, used by thieves both as a training device when learning to walk silently and develop good balance, and during inclement weather. Why get your feet wet when you don't have to? These clogs also grip ice better than regular boots do, offering a +2 bonus to Dexterity checks when keeping one's balance on an icy surface.

Coating, Copper

The amount of copper described here is just enough to completely cover a coin, encasing it in a thin shell of the cheapest metal of coin quality. It makes coins of silver, gold, electrum, platinum, or other metals appear cheaper, yet it can be chipped off the coin in a matter of minutes when the owner wants to buy something.

Crickets, Caged

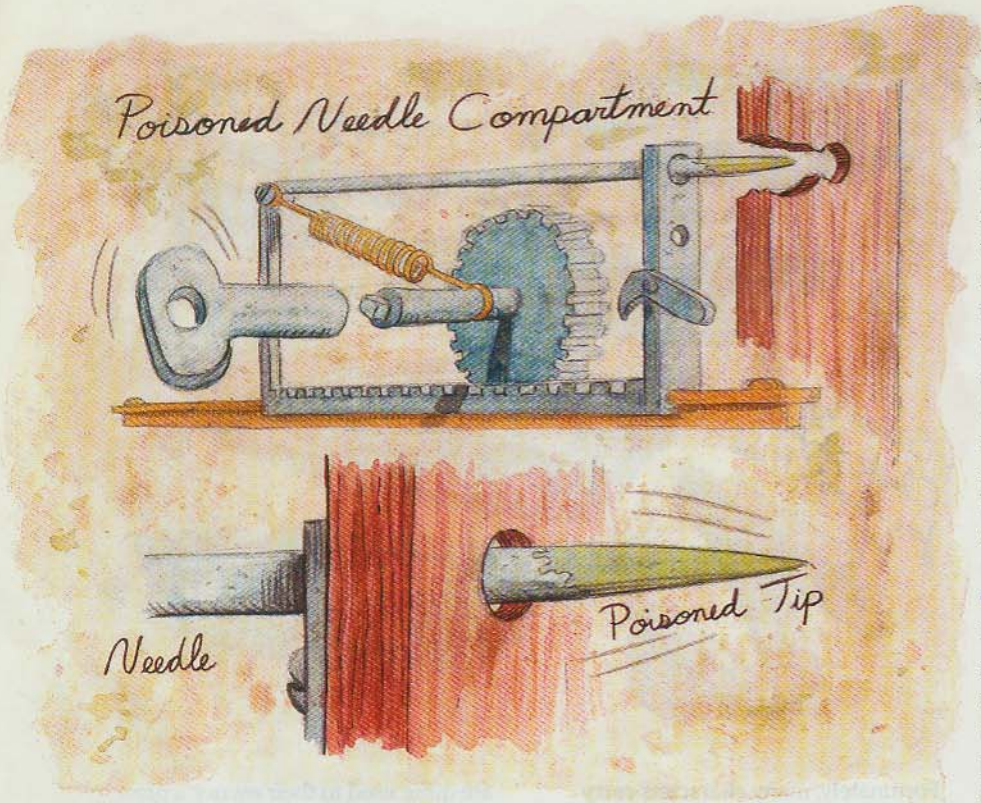
Thieves discovered early on that wild crickets stop chirping if an intruder enters the area, the sudden silence alerting the guards. These crickets, however, are quite used to their owner's presence, and when the local crickets sense his approach and shut up, he can simply pull out the cage and let his own crickets provide all the happy sounds the sentries need to stay at a reduced level of alertness.

Dice, Weighted

Weighted dice have the extra weight on whatever side their owner desires (the side must be specified before they are made), so that during a game of chance, as long as they are properly thrown (part of the Gaming proficiency covers this), the dice will yield the desired result.

Disguise Kit

When a quick change of appearance is essential to one's continued well-being, a disguise kit can be quite useful. This consists of wigs, false beards, and mustaches (all held together with resin), eye patches, and various pigments for lightening or darkening the skin, to say nothing of hair dyes for those who have more time to prepare. The disguise kit grants a +1 bonus to the Disguise proficiency, or a 40% chance of being disguised without the proficiency, when a simple false beard, wig, eyepatch, or another piece is worn. Add skin pigments and/or hair dye, and those without the Disguise proficiency have a



60% chance of being successfully disguised, while those who have it gain a +3 bonus.

Doka

A device used by ninjas, this is a small portable heater made of a shell or a hollow iron box in which burning coals are placed. Having coals on hand saves time starting a fire when one's torch goes out, obviating the need to mess with flint and steel. It can also be used to warm hands in the winter, as many thief activities, such as lockpicking, are nearly impossible to perform while wearing gloves.

Drill, Small

The small drill is used for boring holes through doors. Why risk contact poisons and ear seekers by listening at a door to determine whether anyone's there when it's easy to drill a hole quietly in the door and see? Unless the sentry on the other side is looking straight at the spot one is working on, he'll never know anyone's there until it's too late. Five rounds of drilling can bore a hole through a wooden door of normal thickness.

Footgear, Spiked

These shoes or sandals with spiked soles are a favorite with those who climb. As with the alpenstock, their main use is to help grip a climbing surface (+5% bonus to Climb Walls checks on any cracked, rough, or ice wall surface), with backup use as a weapon. A kicking (pummeling) attack on a foe of any size inflicts 1d4 points of damage.

Gloves, Clawed

These gloves fitted with animal claws are useful for both climbing (+5% bonus to Climb Walls checks) and fighting. The claws inflict 1d4 points of damage on foes of any size, and using them counts as an unarmed attack.

Gloves, Lead-Weighted

A concealed weapon when the thief is operating in an urban setting, particularly in cold weather, this set of gloves adds 2 points to the damage inflicted by a punching attack. Depending on the wielder's discretion, this damage can be either subduing or regular damage. If one wants a weapon of some sort handy at the royal court, no matter how thoroughly the guards search all visitors, then these gloves are ideal.

Goggles, Semitransparent

Although this device was invented by a clever thief, any class of adventurer can use it. These murky crystal goggles allow just enough light through so the wearer can see the outlines of objects—particularly moving ones—but not details. The wearer can move about with visibility as if in dense fog and fights with a –2 penalty to attack rolls—or no penalty if the wearer has the Blind-fighting proficiency. In return for putting up with these handicaps, the wearer is immune to all gaze weapons that operate only when the attacker gazes into the victim's eyes (the petrifying attacks of basilisks and medusae, a vampire's *charm* attempts, and so on). The goggles were invented by a thief who had lost a few too many comrades trying to loot a medusa's lair.

Hacksaw, Small

If a thief can't pick that padlock or prefers not to risk trying due to fear of a poison trap, she can saw it off. If she thinks she'll be pursued through the passages of a dungeon or castle, she should leave a door open and saw off the handle on the side opening inward. Then, when leaving, one can slam the door shut in a hurry, leaving pursuers with no means of opening it again. This hacksaw cuts one quarter-inch square per round and has a practical lifespan of ten uses.

Kameikada

This invention of the ninja is a wooden or bamboo raft that floats higher in the water than normal rafts because it is mounted on sealed, watertight jars. The kameikada can support about 200 lbs. It can also double as a low bench on land, if one doesn't want to sit in the mud or spread one's loot out for counting and dividing in the dirt.

Lard

Why pay a fortune for a vial of *oil of slipperiness*—assuming a thief can find a seller in the first place—when a good coating of common lard applied to the clothing, skin, and hair will make the thief as hard to hold onto as the proverbial greased pig? A thief so beslimed gains a +4 bonus to AC against any grappling attacks. A thief smeared with lard should be wary of any source of heat, or she could end up smelling like cooking bacon, probably attracting guard dogs or more exotic creatures in the process.

Lizard, Climbing

These highly trained lizards are several feet long, powerful climbers, and have hooked claws that can grip rock or masonry. If a thief comes across a wall that he can't scale but the lizard can, the thief ties a light rope to the creature and lets it go up the wall. Once at the top, the well-trained lizard sinks its claws deep for as strong a hold as possible, supporting his owner's weight for the short period it takes the thief to slip up the rope. Sadly, this trick doesn't work in cold weather, due to the cold-blooded metabolism of reptiles.

Obi

This thick scarf is worn by the ninja, and not just to keep warm. One can hang weapons and other gear on it, use it as a whip or garrote in combat, and because of its thickness, it can be set down on a creaky floor so the owner can walk across it without making any noise (+15% bonus to Move Silently checks).

Poisoned Needle Compartment

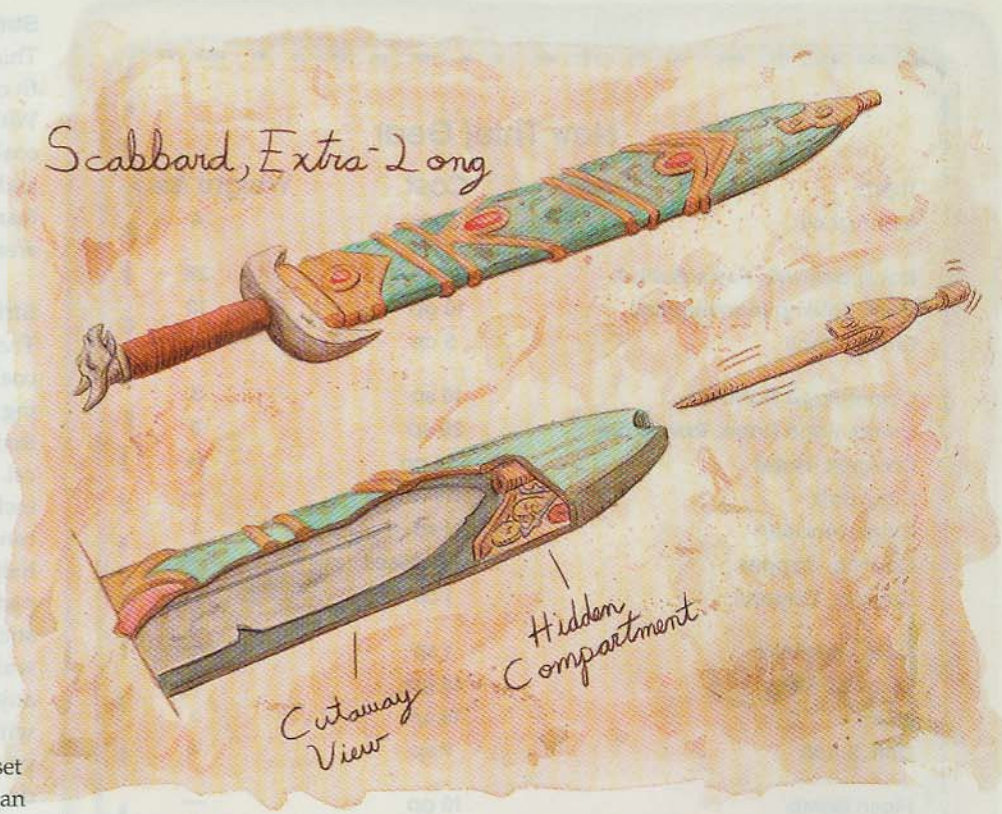
Why should rich merchants, powerful lords, archmages, and high priests be the only ones who employ poison traps? For the price given in the list below, a box, lock, sword or dagger hilt, or other item can be booby-trapped with a spring-loaded poisoned needle that will prick the hand of anyone who doesn't handle the thing just right. The owner chooses before construction the precise method of handling the item without setting off the trap. Note that the price covers only the needle, the spring mechanism, and the effort of hollowing out the affected area; poison costs extra.

Quarterstaff, Hollow

As a weapon, the hollow quarterstaff inflicts 1 less point of damage than its solid counterpart (but always at least 1 point of damage on a successful attack). Its main use is to conceal such things as coins; lockpicking tools; small lengths of rope, cord, or string; and so forth.

Robe, Camouflage

If your thief spends working hours sneaking around and blending in with her surroundings, her clothing should blend as well. All-black robes are a favorite among thieves, but one should also invest in rock- or earth-colored robes for sneaking around castles or other stone buildings. There are also jungle camouflage robes for travel through a forest or park, or all-white robes for sneaking around in winter when the ground is covered in snow. A good investment would be a reversible robe, which is one color or combination of colors on one side and another on the other side; this costs twice as much as a normal robe.



Robe With Hidden Pockets

This item of apparel is ideal for someone who makes a living snatching small but valuable items such as coins, gems, and pieces of jewelry. The price on the table below is the cost per hidden pocket; this applies to any kind of robe, including camouflaged and reversible robes.

Rope, Wire-Filled

This is a standard 50-foot length of rope woven around a length of metal wire. The owner has all the advantages of using a length of wire but seems to be carrying an ordinary (and cheaper) rope that doesn't look like it's worth stealing. The surprise value alone when someone tries to cut the thing is worth it.

Sack, Ox-Skin

This huge sack can be pumped full of air with a blacksmith's bellows, tightly sealed, and then used as a flotation device to cross water obstacles. Warriors who lead troops on campaigns often buy these in large numbers, then set them in rows across rivers and streams to form a temporary bridge.

Scabbard, Extra-Long

Commission a specially crafted sword scabbard up to 6 inches longer than the blade, then use the extra space to hide treasure, lockpicks, and whatnot. This scabbard also has a detachable tip so the owner can get at her stuff without yanking the sword out first. This enables it to be used as a breathing tube when underwater.

Shuko

A climbing device popular among ninjas, this consists of an iron band worn over the hand, with four spikes protruding from the palm side. It affords a +5% bonus to Climb Walls checks. Damage in combat is the same as clawed gloves.

New Thief Gear

Item	Cost	Weight (lbs.)
Alpenstock	5 sp	4
Backpack With False Bottom	3 gp	2½
Boat, Folding (nonmagical)	10 gp	10
Brush, Small	5 cp	—
Camouflage Robe	10 sp	3
Camouflage Robe, Reversible	20 sp	3
Catapult, Hand	350 gp	14
Clay, Soft	1 cp/10 doses	—
Clogs, Wooden	1 sp	1
Coating, Copper	1 cp/10 doses	—
Crickets, Cageful	1 cp	½
Dice, Weighted	1 sp	—
Disguise Kit	15 gp	2
Doka	15 sp	1
Drill, Small	7 sp	½
Flash Bomb	10 gp	—
Gloves, Clawed	2 gp	½
Gloves, Lead-Weighted	2 gp	1
Goggles, Semitransparent	30 gp	½
Hacksaw, Small	2 gp	1
Kamelkada	5 gp	20
Lard	1 cp/10 doses	—
Lizard, Climbing	70 gp	10
Obi	6 sp	—
Ox-Skin Sack	20 gp	1
Poisoned Needle Cmpt.	10 gp	—
Quarterstaff, Hollow	10 gp	2
Resin-Coated Strip	20 gp	—
Robe With Hidden Pockets	8 sp/pocket	—
Rope, 50 ft., Wire-Filled Hemp	100 gp	60
Rope, 50 ft., Wire-Filled Silk	110 gp	48
Scabbard, Extra-Long	12 sp	3½
Shuko	3 gp	½
Spiked Footgear	2 gp	1
Tekagi	4 gp	½
Tin Strip	6 sp	—
Wire, Metal	2 gp/ft.	40

Strip, Tin

This thin strip of metal is designed to fit over the firing pouch of a sling. With it in place, one can hurl burning coals, wooden bullets soaked in oil, and other incendiary missiles without fear of damaging or destroying this weapon.

Strips, Resin-Coated

These light strips of wood are heavily coated with resin on both sides, causing them to stick to anything other than cloth treated with a special chemical. The price of the treated cloth is included in the price of each strip; one can buy a strip without the cloth for half-price, but getting it out of a backpack is another matter entirely! These sticky strips can be placed against walls, boulders, pieces of furniture, or anything else, then used to hang tools within easy reach when the thief has a particularly complicated bit of work to do. Warriors defending fortified positions can even cover the walls around them with these strips, then hang arrows, javelins, and other projectiles on them for added firepower when they run out of room for floor racks and quivers.

Tekagi

Another climbing device developed by the ninja, the tekagi is a hook attached to the climber's wrist with metal bands to hold it in place. It grants a +5% bonus to Climb Walls checks. If used as a weapon of last resort, it inflicts damage equal to that of the clawed gloves.

Wire, Metal

A metal wire is not loose and flexible like a length of rope, but one can bend it into one precise shape or position, and it will stay there. It is also harder to sever than rope and does not fray or burn, though it should be cleaned with oily rags regularly to keep it from rusting. Due to its strength, it is far superior to rope in either supporting the weight of a climber or restraining a prisoner.

Greg Detwiler is the first contributor to persuade us that "lard" belonged in an article on equipment.

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Chenna pointed the wand at Ripper. A thin ray of grayish light, nearly invisible in the bright sunlight, instantly leapt from the arrowhead to strike the griffon in the ribs.

Illustrated by Therese Nielsen

Fiction by

Richard Lee Byers

Shamur's Wager

The barn was spacious, immaculately kept, and smelled of oats and hay. Tall and slender, her long hair a paler gold than the straw, Shamur Uskevren moved from one stall to the next, appraising the handsome animals inside, seeking a horse with the speed and stamina to win a long race. A flock of her fellow noblewomen, many ridiculously costumed as milkmaids, shepherdesses, and nymphs, trailed along chattering behind her.

When Shamur finished her inspection, she turned and said, "I'll take the Cormyrean Strider. The bay with the white socks."

Chenna Talendar smirked. Shamur's hostess was a small, olive-skinned woman whose elaborate coiffure of jet-black ringlets with magenta highlights was a triumph of the hairdresser's art. Her peasant attire was stitched of fine cambric and sarcanet, and her thin lips were red with fucus. "But you mustn't pick yet," she said, laughter lurking in her tone. "Not until you see all the choices."

Chenna conducted her guests back out of the barn and toward a similar structure some distance away. As they neared it, Shamur caught a peculiar scent, reminiscent of both the musky odor of great cats and of the smell of the mews where her father had kept his falcons. It made her feel vaguely uneasy, but she still didn't comprehend just how she'd been tricked until Chenna pushed open the door.

In the middle of the earthen floor was a large cage, the steel bars scarred with shiny gouges and scratches where something had gnawed on them. Inside paced the creatures responsible for the damage—enormous, red-eyed beasts with the heads, talons, and yellow-feathered wings of eagles and the furry lower bodies and hind legs of lions. A pair of male griffons, housed well apart from the horses, their favorite prey.

"If you recall," Chenna purred, "we never stipulated we'd ride horses. We agreed you could choose any mount on the farm, and I would select from those remaining."

Shamur had indeed agreed to that, and she knew a griffon could travel faster and farther than any horse. Unfortunately, she'd never in her life ridden a flying steed.

Shamur's predicament had actually begun a week earlier, at an auction of antiques and objets d'art. She had attended because it was expected, the only reason she did anything anymore.

She sat brooding and bored through the sale of the first dozen pieces, until the auctioneer produced an ivory brooch exquisitely carved with the image of a sphinx. It bore a nick on one edge, from the time it had turned a dagger thrust and likely saved its wearer's life. Recognizing it instantly, Shamur caught her breath.

She hastily shouted out an opening bid one hundred fivestars higher than the auctioneer had requested.

The brooch had once served to clasp the gray woolen cloak of Errendar Spillwine, the veteran thief who long ago, on a whim, had taken a hoydenish patrician girl under his wing, teaching her to walk softly as a cat, climb like a spider, and melt into the shadows like a ghost. How it had come into the possession of the auction house, Shamur had no idea, nor did she care. She only knew she had to have it. She hastily shouted out an opening bid one hundred fivestars higher than the auctioneer had requested.

Her resolve to acquire the pin was thus made apparent to all, and she hoped it would dissuade anyone else from bidding against her. Instead, the opposite occurred. Chenna Talendar was present that night, and her house and the Uskevren were bitter rivals. Chenna accordingly decided it would be amusing to thwart Shamur, and from that moment on, the outcome was foreordained. The Talendar were quite possibly the wealthiest merchant-noble family in Selgaunt, their purses deep enough to support any extravagance. The Uskevren had yet to recover fully from their near annihilation years before. Thus, when Chenna blithely bid a truly preposterous sum, Shamur saw little choice but to drop out.

Shamur's Wager

She spent the next few days struggling not to imagine how satisfying it would be to break into Old High Hall, the Talendar castle, and steal Errendar's brooch. Such a scheme naturally tempted the adventurer whose daring thefts had once astonished the city. But it was out of the question for the woman Shamur had become.

Born Shamur Karn, adventurous daughter of a merchant noble, she had plundered the lords of Selgaunt decades earlier. When one of her victims discovered her identity, she fled and never expected to see her kindred or home again. But after a strange magic displaced her fifty years forward in time, she realized it would be safe to return. No one would be hunting her anymore.

Upon her arrival, she found that a series of failed trading ventures had all but ruined the Karns. Their one hope lay with another Shamur, the original's grand-niece, who resembled her exactly. The prosperous noble Thamalon Uskevren desired to wed the younger Shamur and would pay a fortune in gold for the privilege.

But then the prospective bride died mysteriously. To save her family from destitution, Shamur assumed the identity of her lookalike kinswoman and married the stranger to whom she had been betrothed. She was still trying to accustom herself to the idea that she would have to carry on the impersonation for the remainder of her life.

After a strange magic displaced her fifty years forward in time, she realized it would be safe to return. No one would be hunting her anymore.

A week after the auction, Chenna sent Shamur an invitation asking her to a "pastorale" at the Talendar farm beyond the city walls. Pastorales were the parties in vogue that summer, picnics where Selgaunt's sophisticates played at being simple rustics and listened to minstrels rhapsodize over the joys of a bucolic existence.

No matter how fierce their covert enmities, it was customary for Selgaunt's urbane nobles to attend one another's fetes. Indeed, if Shamur failed to make an appearance, the other ladies would conclude that Chenna truly had upset her by depriving her of the brooch, and her status and reputation would suffer accordingly. Therefore, she saw no option but to go, and the appointed afternoon found her morosely sipping dry white wine while watching her peers inexpertly collect eggs in a hennery, chivvy a herd of goats around a pasture, and weed a garden, pulling up the bean sprouts along with the tares as often as not.

As Shamur had expected, Chenna soon sought her out. The ivory brooch gleamed on the Talendar's bosom. "What do you think?" she asked, indicating the pin with a wave of her hand.

"It looks quite elegant," Shamur replied, "and makes a refreshing change from the baubles you generally wear."

The smaller woman laughed. "My poor darling. You fell in love with the piece the instant you laid eyes on it, didn't you? And I suppose it was hideously cruel of me to wrest it away. But perhaps I can make amends. Perhaps there's still a way for you to have it."

Shamur kept her expression bland and her voice light. "You overestimate my interest. The brooch is pretty, but I have boxes full of pretty jewelry. However, I confess, you've piqued my curiosity. Exactly what are you proposing?"

"I think these pastorales have run their course, don't you? This one is certainly tedious. As hostess, I have a duty to liven it up. Perhaps with a competition and a wager."

"Of what sort?"

"I'm told you're something of an equestrienne, as am I. So why not a race between you and me? To the far end of the High Bridge and back again."

"An intriguing notion, but impossible, since I came by carriage."

"What of it? Choose any mount on the farm for your steed, and I'll pick from those remaining. I'll put up the brooch and you can bet, oh, shall we say that silver bracelet?"

Shamur hesitated. As Chenna doubtless knew, the article in question had belonged to her husband's mother, and was one of the few family heirlooms to survive the burning of the original Stormweather Towers. Thamalon would be appalled if she lost it, and she would be mad to run the risk.

And yet...

In most respects, Shamur and her younger namesake had been as disparate in spirit as they were identical in face and form. The demure, pacific grand-niece had felt a squeamish abhorrence of weapons, eschewing even the dagger that nearly every noblewoman carried somewhere about her person for self-defense. In consequence, the impostor who'd taken her place, and who loved swordplay with a fierce devotion, could never fence again, any more than she could burgle a mansion or rob a merchant in the street, lest her anomalous behavior betray her masquerade.

But the two Shamurs had shared one passion: They'd both loved to ride. That meant this was one challenge the survivor could accept without giving herself away. As in better days, she could measure herself against an adversary, gallop headlong through Selgaunt's crowded streets, constantly at risk of a bone-shattering collision—the danger as exhilarating as making love. Win the memento she so coveted and humble this smug, spiteful harpy in the bargain!

"It's a wager," she said.

Shamur gazed at the griffon in dismay. "Is something wrong?" Chenna asked innocently. "I suppose that if you're no longer inclined to race, you can simply forfeit and surrender the bracelet now."

The other ladies tittered.

That ripple of malicious merriment stung Shamur, rousing her from her consternation. Meekly beg off and hand over a cherished piece of Uskevren treasure? Become the butt of a joke that her peers would snigger over for years to come? No, by all the gods, never! Flying steeds or no, somehow she must still contrive to win this game.

She smiled. "Forfeit and deprive our friends of an entertainment? I wouldn't dream of it. Have I now seen all the riding animals on the estate?"

"I'm afraid so," Chenna said. "We had a wyvern for a while, but no one was able to train it, so my brother had it slaughtered for the hide."

"Then I'll make do with one of these," said Shamur. She studied the griffons in the cage. One was perceptibly larger than the other, with a deeper chest and longer wings. It appeared more spirited as well, watching the humans outside the bars with a smoldering, murderous eye.

Call her reckless, irresponsible, or even demented, but by Tymora, she was about to test her courage as in the lost, sweet days of yore...

Chenna obviously had experience riding griffons, or she would never have proposed the competition. Shamur had to accept that she would be the poorer rider. But perhaps if she had the stronger and more mettlesome mount, its virtues would compensate for her own inadequacies.

"I'll take the big one," she said.

If possible, Chenna's smirk radiated even more sly mockery than before. "Truly? Then so be it, my dear." She turned toward the grooms loitering unobtrusively along the back wall. "Lady Uskevren and I are going for a ride. Saddle Ripper for her, and Arrow for me."

The grooms in their shoulder-length, reinforced leather gloves opened the cage and led the griffons out onto the grass with a wariness that bespoke a deep distrust of the creatures' temperament. Shamur watched carefully as one of the men saddled her steed, making sure he pulled the girth tight. Since Chenna was already confident of winning, it seemed unlikely that she'd somehow cued the retainer to send her rival aloft with faulty gear. But Shamur wouldn't put it past her.

Another servant brought the Uskevren a harness and helped her strap it on. Then it was time to swing up into the saddle. Despite the hindrance of her skirts, Shamur fancied that she at least managed to accomplish that as if she knew what she about, but Ripper evidently wasn't impressed. The griffon hissed and quivered as if he found his burden loathsome.

Shamur gathered that she was supposed to attach the trailing straps of her harness to the brass buckles on the saddle, thus making it impossible for her to fall off. She adjusted them to her satisfaction, then looked up at Chenna. Seated atop her own steed, the dark woman wore a look of weary patience, as if Shamur, pathetic novice that she was, was taking an absurdly long time with her preparations.

"Ready?" Chenna called.

"Not quite," Shamur replied, refusing to be rushed when she needed another moment to familiarize herself with her tack. She had six reins, which threaded through grommets in a thick leather collar and would evidently allow her to pull Ripper's head right, left, up, or down. A pointed length of seasoned oak hung in a scabbard, an implement to chastise a creature too hardy and savage to heed a stroke from a crop or whip.

Everything else, she supposed, she'd have to learn in the air. "Now I'm ready," she said.

"Splendid!" Chenna said. "To the far end of the High Bridge and back again. Dolera Milna, dear, could you give us an on your mark, ready, fly?"

"I'd be delighted," said Dolera Milna Foxmantle. One of Selgaunt's most notable beauties, she was still carrying a muddy gardening trowel in one dainty, manicured hand. "I'll also signal with this ... utensil, shall I?" She raised the trowel. "On your mark..."

Shamur looked at Chenna astride her griffon, and at all the other ladies either gazing up at the two of them or frantically making last-minute wagers among themselves. She regarded the baleful aquiline head of her mount and felt the rock-hard contours of his muscularleonine flanks between her legs. And she thought, this is really happening.

"... ready ..."

And it was. She was doing it. Call her reckless, irresponsible, or even demented, but by Tymora, she was about to test her courage as in the lost, sweet days of yore, before she entombed herself in the plush oubliette of her grand-niece's cramped, banal life. She grinned fiercely.

"... fly!" The trowel swept down.

Chenna cried, "La!" Her griffon beat his wings with a startling snap, and mount and rider shot up into the air.

"La!" shouted Shamur, imitating her rival. Ripper remained in place.

Shamur kicked the brute in the flanks, and he merely twisted his massive, golden-feathered head around to look at her. She could have sworn she read contemptuous amusement in his beady crimson eye.

"All right, you whoreson," she snarled. She disliked using brutality to control any steed, but she'd do what she had to. She reached for the oaken goad.

Shamur's Wager

With a lurch that slammed the saddle into her backside, Ripper flapped his wings and hurtled into the sky. In a heartbeat the beast was fifty feet off the ground, bucking madly in an attempt to unseat his rider, an effort that might well have succeeded if not for Shamur's harness.

Hastily rising in her stirrups to stop the saddle pounding her backside, Shamur hauled savagely on the reins with one hand and battered Ripper with the shaft of oak in the other. The griffon responded by plunging across the sky, veering, swooping, or ascending unpredictably every other moment.

Upon sighting a wild griffon, a learned and garrulous comrade had once favored Shamur with an impromptu disquisition on the habits of such beasts, including the assertion that, though relatively agile in the air, they couldn't somersault or roll over on their backs and fly upside down. The Uskevren now found cause to doubt her old friend's opinions. Certainly, as Ripper wrenched her through one vertiginous maneuver after another, it often seemed as if the world was whirling like a wheel, or as if the verdant fields and pastures of the Talendar farm were suspended directly over her head.

Shamur forced the creature—and herself—to keep falling for a long time. Ripper had to feel his helplessness, feel the fear.

But Shamur was both an accomplished rider and a climber accustomed to heights. Though her head spun and her stomach churned, Ripper's antics could neither panic nor disorient her. She kept on doggedly fighting for control, and eventually the griffon ceased his defiant acrobatics and began to fly steadily toward the southwest. Unfortunately, that meant he was proceeding in precisely the wrong direction, but after some experimentation with the reins, she managed to get him turned around.

Feeling or at least hoping she'd established some semblance of mastery, Shamur urged Ripper to fly faster. Otherwise they'd never catch up with Chenna, who already had a daunting lead. After repeated kicks, the griffon did indeed condescend to beat his wings a bit more rapidly. Then he spied the horses.

By now Shamur and Ripper were flying over a farm belonging to the Foxmantles, a house renowned for breeding superior horses which, thanks to the use of a secret magic, were always born either black as night or pearly gray. A dozen such mares and colts stood grazing in an enclosed pasture. When they somehow sensed the griffin's approach, they began to run back and forth, seeking an exit in the high white wooden fence, which, with the gate closed, simply wasn't there.

Ripper furled his wings and dived, talons poised to strike.

Shamur dragged on the reins with all her strength and repeatedly clubbed the griffon over the head. Ripper pulled out of the precipitous descent, but only to subject his rider to another punishing session of bucking and sudden, sickening changes of direction. Then, evidently hoping he'd pounded and spun the human into quiescence, he plummeted at the horses a second time.

"To the Abyss with this," Shamur rasped. She studied Ripper's shoulder, where his huge pinion joined his body, looking for a pressure point. When she thought she'd found one, she thrust the pointed end of the goad into it and held it there.

The wing went into spasms, and suddenly, deprived of its use, the griffon was no longer diving. Rather, he was dropping like a stone.

Shamur forced the creature—and herself—to keep falling for a long time. Ripper had to feel his helplessness, feel the fear. Finally she removed the crippling goad, and at once her mount began to beat his wings. Seemingly to no effect.

The blond rider watched in dismay as the earth hurtled up to meet them, as the terrified animals in the enclosure swelled from tiny scurrying mites to full-size horses and the pasture changed from a featureless expanse of green to a patch of grassy ground with slight elevations and declivities, dotted here and there with mounds of brown droppings.

She'd waited too long, she decided, and in consequence, she and Ripper were going to die.

But at the last possible instant, wings a blur, their frenzied beating a throbbing roar, Ripper managed to level off, his hooked claws and leonine paws clearing the white wooden fence with only inches to spare.

The griffon rose into the cloudless azure sky. Panting, soaked in sweat, Shamur held the goad poised to cripple him again if he became refractory, but there was no need. He now flew steadily and heeded the guidance of the reins.

Shamur leaned forward in the saddle, bringing her mouth closer to Ripper's ear. "Any more defiance," she said, "and I swear to Mask I'll smash you to jelly on the ground. And now that we're clear on that, look!" She pointed to the northeast with the goad. "Arrow is smaller and weaker than you, but already far ahead." Actually she couldn't even see Chenna's mount anymore, but she hoped Ripper's eagle eyes could. "If you have any pride, then you won't let that runt best you! Be my ally and win this race!"

She knew it was absurd to believe that Ripper had understood a single word. Yet for whatever reason, when she touched her mount with her heels, he hurtled forward. The acceleration rocked her backward and demonstrated instantly that hitherto, the griffon had vouchsafed her only a fraction of his speed.

Tugging on the reins, she made sure Ripper understood what direction he was supposed to go, then pretty much trusted him to do it as rapidly as possible. After that, she had her first true taste of the bliss of flight. The wind kissed her face and unraveled her coiffure, fluttering her hair out behind her like a banner. She marveled at the facility with which her

mount navigated the unseen currents of the air, catching and riding the updrafts that catapulted them higher into the sky. All the while, the world spread out beneath her like a wondrous, enchanted toy. Minute as a column of ants, a caravan crept along the great trade route known as the Way of the Manticore. At the road's terminus shone Selgaunt, the greatest city in Sembia, a fabulous aggregation of castles, temples, brownstone tallhouses, and the sundry marketplaces and emporia where all manner of goods were bought and sold. Along the town's north wall ran the shining ribbon of the River Elzimmer, rushing to spend itself in Selgaunt Bay. Dozens of ships rode at anchor in the harbor, and far out on the blue sea danced white flecks that must be the sails of several more.

Shamur was partway across the city when she spied Chenna coming back the other way. The black-haired woman scowled to see how much distance her opponent had made up. Shamur grinned. Ripper gave a harsh raptor's cry and flew even faster.

In two more minutes they reached the High Bridge, an immense stone structure lined with houses and shops. Shamur scrupulously flew to the far end of the span, then wheeled Ripper around.

The griffon fell a dozen yards before his flailing pinions arrested his descent.

She caught up with Chenna halfway between the city and the Talendar farm.

Golden plumage gleaming in the sunlight, Ripper pulled up even with Arrow and then began to draw ahead. Her features twisted with anger, Chenna repeatedly lashed the smaller griffon with her goad. Shamur smiled and blew the Talendar a kiss.

Perhaps it was that bit of mockery that nettled Chenna into sheer unreasoning fury. For when the Uskevren glanced back, she saw the other rider's mouth moving, and her hands weaving in the unmistakable manner of a mage casting a spell. A spark of golden light appeared between them, then shot forward at Ripper.

Shamur hadn't known that Chenna had received any schooling in the arcane arts, and her ignorance seemed likely to cost her dear. Shamur frantically tugged on the reins, and Ripper swooped downward and to the left.

A bare instant later, the luminous mote reached the space they'd just vacated and, with a crackling boom, exploded into flame. Singed by the edge of the blast, Ripper screeched. Had the spell struck the griffon squarely, the mount and his rider might both have been incinerated.

Surely, Shamur thought desperately, if Chenna were a truly powerful sorceress, she would have heard rumor of it. Surely the Talendar couldn't cast that spell a second time.

And maybe she couldn't, but she now reached inside her sleeve and brought out a wand, a slender bronze rod with a tip resembling an arrowhead. It was undoubtedly a weapon, and a spellcaster could activate such lethal devices over and over again.

Chenna pointed the wand at Ripper. A thin ray of grayish light, nearly invisible in the bright sunlight, instantly leapt from the arrowhead to strike the griffon in the ribs.

Ripper shrieked. The beating of his wings faltered, and when it resumed it was at first spastic and asynchronous. The griffon fell a dozen yards before his flailing pinions arrested his descent. Jolted about by her mount's struggles, Shamur lost her grip on her goad, which vanished into the gulf beneath the animal's mismatched feet.

Leaning to the side, Shamur examined Ripper's flank. No puncture or burn marred the creature's dusky golden fur. Yet the griffon was clearly hurt, and now Arrow swooped at him. The wand gleamed at the end of Chenna's outstretched arm.

Shamur tried to urge Ripper away from the Talendar, but to no avail. Another pale ray struck her mount in the center of his wickedly curved beak. The griffin convulsed and plummeted again until, floundering in the air like a drowning man, he painfully managed to catch himself.

A third beam might well kill Ripper, consigning Shamur to a fatal fall in the bargain, and she could only think of one course of action likely to induce Chenna, who currently had the advantages of a ranged weapon, altitude, and an unwounded mount, to break off the attack. The blond rider turned her griffon back toward Selgaunt, as if she were abandoning the race. Wracked by a power beyond his comprehension, Ripper wheeled as if eager to do precisely that. Chenna laughed and sped on toward the Talendar estate.

Shamur waited a moment, allowing her rival to increase her lead, then pulled on the reins, turning Ripper to pursue. The griffon responded sluggishly, manifestly reluctant to approach his tormentor a second time.

Shamur leaned forward over the creature's neck. "I know she hurt you," she said, "but help me now, give me everything you have, and I promise we'll make her pay for it!" She tugged on the reins and touched Ripper with her heels, and now the griffon soared upward with at least a semblance of his former ardor.

She pointed Ripper straight at Arrow, then crooned a steady string of encouragements, imploring the griffon to fly faster than he'd ever flown before. For they had to come up on their rivals suddenly, by surprise. If Chenna noticed them approaching before they closed the distance, she'd simply use the wand again, and they would be as helpless against the weapon as before.

Hitherto Ripper had made flight appear virtually effortless, even at high speeds. Now Shamur could tell that the griffon was straining and in pain. There was a subtle difference, something ungainly and labored, in the stroke of his wings and the way he held his head. His chest heaved as he fought for breath, and though it might have been her imagination, Shamur even

fancied she could feel the great beast's heart pounding though the shifting musculature of his flanks.

Yet somehow, his distress notwithstanding, he was quickly carrying Shamur where she wanted to go. So she'd best decide what to do when they got there.

She didn't know if it was natural for griffons to attack one another in the air, or if she, with her rudimentary flying skills, could induce Ripper to do so. She supposed it wasn't an option in any case. The nobles of Selgaunt slew one another often enough in formal duels, impromptu brawls, and, occasionally, open warfare. But it simply wasn't acceptable to murder one's hostess or to resort to bloodshed to win a supposedly friendly, peaceable competition, even if, transported by the passions of the moment, Chenna appeared to have forgotten that particular point of etiquette. If Shamur survived and her opponent didn't, their fellow aristocrats would ask questions. The more suspicious and opportunistic would make imputations of treachery, dishonor, and criminality which House Uskevren, disgraced by Thamalon's late father and only recently restored to a tenuous respectability, could ill afford.

Such being the case, Shamur would have to eliminate the threat of the wand without recourse to Ripper's deadly beak and talons. The question was, how? A griffon was so large and its wingspan so broad that riders flying on the backs of such beasts were virtually beyond one another's reach. Had Shamur still possessed the goad, she might conceivably have leaned far out to the side and managed an effective blow, but as it was, she could think of only one maneuver that might enable her to come to grips with her opponent.

Well, she thought, grinning wryly, she had told herself she wanted to test her bravery one last time.

She guided Ripper a little higher, so they'd come in just above Chenna and Arrow. Then, when the griffon had nearly caught up with their opponents, she unbuckled her harness from her saddle and swung her left leg over Ripper's spine. Now riding sidesaddle, she hitched up her skirts and jammed her right foot completely through her stirrup so that the iron gripped her just above the ankle. She twisted the leather around her leg for good measure, then, clinging to the saddle, climbed down Ripper's flank behind the pounding wing. When she'd lowered herself as far as she could that way, she released her handholds and dropped.

Pain jabbed through her leg as she hit the end of the stirrup. The iron scraped her, and the leather wrenched tight as a noose. Then she was hanging by one foot upside down, her skirts flapping around her torso, suspended at an angle from the pressure of the wind.

If Ripper harbored a grudge over the drubbing Shamur had administered, he would never have a better opportunity for revenge, for should he begin to buck as he had before, he would surely shake her foot loose from the stirrup. But the griffon kept flying steadily on the course she'd chosen for him, a vector that put the inverted Shamur on the same level with Chenna.

Shamur stretched out her arms for the sorceress. In another heartbeat she'd be close enough to lay hands on her, but unfortunately, it was just then that Chenna finally thought to glance around.

Though the Talendar goggled in astonishment, surprise didn't retard her defense. She instantly pointed the wand and barked the trigger word, two grating syllables in a language Shamur didn't recognize. The pale beam lanced from the arrowhead.

Shamur jerked her shoulders to one side, swinging herself at the end of the stirrup like a pendulum. Her ankle slipped a fraction of an inch in its restraints, bringing her that much closer to a fall, and the gray light grazed her anyway.

The touch of the magic sent agony burning along her nerves. Shouting away a portion of the crippling pain, she compelled herself to move purposefully, not merely thrash. She finished her grab and caught hold of the wand.

The iron scraped her, and the leather wrenched tight as a noose.

The two women grappled savagely, the sorceress attempting to force the wand into line for another attack, Shamur struggling to wrest it away. Employing the fighting tricks that Errendar had taught her, the Uskevren eventually managed to twist the magical weapon free and, knowing she lacked the ability to wield it herself, tossed it away to drop to the earth below.

Snarling, Chenna grabbed hold of Shamur's collar with one hand and snatched out a dagger with the other. Shamur desperately parried her opponent's frenzied stabbing, suffering superficial cuts on her hands in the process. Meanwhile she felt Chenna's grip on her gown slowly but inexorably dragging her foot clear of the stirrup.

Finally Chenna paused, as any combatant executing a series of attacks must do eventually. Taking advantage of the last chance she was likely to get, Shamur threw a punch.

It was impossible to hit as hard hanging inverted in midair as she could have done with her feet planted on the ground, but her fist still smashed into Chenna's jaw with a satisfying crack. The Talendar's head snapped back, and then, her clutching hand dropping away from Shamur's collar, she lolled bonelessly in the saddle, held in place only by the restraining straps. The dagger slipped from her fingers.

Arrow evidently sensed that his mistress was no longer capable of commanding him. Weary, likely unsettled by the uncomfortable proximity of Ripper and the outlandish behavior of the two humans, the griffon screeched and swooped lower, veering off to the north as well. Gasping, still shaking and twitching from the pain of the wand's magic, Shamur smiled. Apparently she needn't worry that the beast would opt to speed home to the Talendar farm on his own, thus still winning the race despite the incapacity of his rider.

Her sense of satisfaction died abruptly when her foot lurched another inch through the stirrup.

She realized she had at best a few more seconds to regain her seat. Grunting with effort, her aching muscles protesting, she doubled at the waist, bringing her hands up to where she needed them to be. The action jerked her foot out of her flimsy brocade shoe and clear of the iron.

At the same instant, however, her fingers snatched hold of the leather. She then managed to clamber back into the saddle, though the feat seemed embarrassingly difficult for a woman once accustomed to scaling sheer walls.

She fumbled at the reins and glanced around, making sure that Chenna and Arrow weren't yet soaring in pursuit. No; the smaller griffon was still winging in the wrong direction. Shamur headed Ripper in the right one, at a fair speed but scarcely the breakneck pace of before. She reckoned they didn't need it anymore.

After a while, the pain engendered by the wand faded, and from the way the griffon moved and breathed, it seemed that the same was true of him. The final minutes of the flight were as joyful as any Shamur had ever known, the novel pleasures of flight spicing the old familiar exultation of staking her life and winning.

When she landed and dismounted, her raw, bare foot gave her a twinge. She hugged Ripper's neck, surrendered him to the grooms, then limped forward to accept the congratulations of the other ladies, most of whom were clearly astonished at her success.

"To alter the stakes of our wager."

She attributed the nicks on her hands to a mishap with the reins. She reckoned she had to. With luck, people would believe that pluck and good fortune had carried her to victory in a simple race. But some might well doubt that those attributes alone could preserve the gentle daughter of Lindrian Karn, a woman unschooled in the martial arts or thiefcraft, in a potentially mortal combat.

Fortunately, Shamur thought, Chenna ought to be just as eager as she was to bury the truth, and when the sorceress finally landed, she saw that she was right. Her chin already showing a purple bruise, Chenna had done a good job of composing her features into a mask of haughty indifference, but Shamur could discern a certain wariness in her eyes.

"Darling!" Shamur said, beaming. "Thank you for suggesting such wonderful sport." She embraced Chenna and felt the angry, distrustful rigidity in her body. "Walk with me for a moment, won't you?" She led the Talendar away from the others, who peered after them curiously.

"What do you want?" Chenna gritted, her voice too soft for the spectators to overhear.

"You have a problem," Shamur replied, equally softly. "You behaved badly. When the word gets out, many people will condemn you as vicious and dishonorable, and everyone, including your own kin, will laugh themselves sick at your ineptitude. For you had every advantage in our little confrontation, and yet I beat you."

"If you tell the story, I'll deny it."

"You could try, I suppose, although folk are always eager to credit the lurid and shameful. Wouldn't life be more pleasant if we didn't tell? Perhaps that can be arranged."

Chenna eyed her suspiciously. "How? What do you want?"

"To alter the stakes of our wager. I've decided I don't particularly fancy the brooch after all." It was true. During the final minutes of her flight, she'd realized her victory had already reassured her that the adventurer Errendar had tutored still lived inside her, and done so more effectively than any mere keepsake ever could. "Give me Ripper instead."

"Done," Chenna replied. "I hope he bears you to your death."

Shamur remembered Chenna's malediction five days later, as the oxen drew the rumbling wagon toward the crest of a wooded hill. She was keenly tempted to give the curse a chance to come true, to keep Ripper and ride him every day.

But in her heart, she knew it would be wrong. For one afternoon at least, the griffon had given her back her freedom, and she meant to return the favor.

When they reached the hilltop, she said, "This is far enough." Far enough from Selgaunt that Ripper wouldn't spy horses as soon as he took flight. She didn't want him to linger near civilization, preying on farm animals and the mounts of travelers. She wanted him to return to the wilderness.

The teamster pulled on the reins, and the oxen lumbered to a halt. Shamur climbed down from the seat and nodded to one of the grooms, who cautiously opened the cage chained to the long, flat bed of the wagon.

Cocking his head, Ripper eyed the open door distrustfully, as if he suspected the humans of perpetrating a prank at his expense. "It's all right," said Shamur. "You can go."

The griffon abruptly lunged through the opening, and the servants scattered. Ripper screeched, unfolded his wings, and snapped them down. Within seconds he was only a speck in the cloudless sky. He wheeled, then hurtled into the west.

As Shamur watched the great beast vanish, a tear came to her eye. She took care to blink it away before the servants noticed.

Richard Lee Byers holds an MA in Psychology. He is the author of over fifteen novels, including Dark Kindoms, X-Men: Soul Killer, The Vampire's Apprentice, *and* Dark Fortune. *His next novel,* The Shattered Mask, *a book-length adventure of Shamur Uskevren, will appear next year.*

A JAMES ERNEST GAME

ABANDON SHIP!

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN KOVALIC

In this game
Aces = 1 point
Jacks = 11 points
Queens = 12 points
Kings = 13 points
All other cards are worth their face value.

The rats are long gone, but you're still here. You and your greedy pirate pals are hustling around the deck of a sinking pirate ship, trying to scoop up as much treasure as you can hold. You've got to have a little treasure to buy your way into a lifeboat, and the best lifeboats are the ones with the most treasure in them. It's kind of complicated. Then again, maybe you're just not very smart.

ABANDON SHIP!

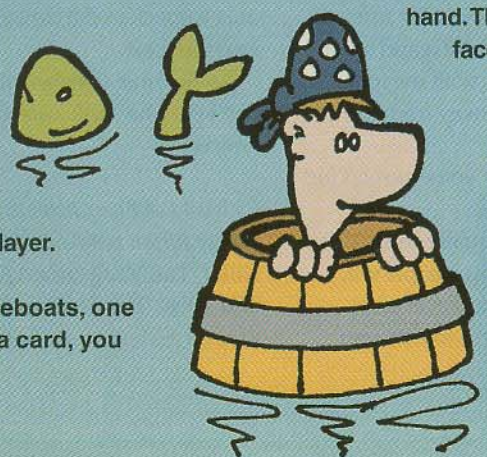
Players: 2 to 5
Playing Time: 1 Hour.
Equipment: A deck of cards and a way to keep score.

Object: Earn 200 points. Play consists of several hands, each of which ends when the last card is drawn from the deck, and the ship sinks. At the end of each hand, players fight to get on the lifeboats in a "Showdown," and they score points based on which lifeboat they board. If you board no lifeboat, you get no points for the hand.

To Begin the Round: Shuffle the deck and deal five cards to each player. If there are only two players, set five cards aside face down; these will not be used in this hand. Play starts with the dealer, and the deal moves to the left with each new hand.

On Your Turn: If you do not have five cards in your hand, draw back up to five. If you draw the last card off of the deck, the ship sinks, and you do not take the rest of your turn.

Unless the ship has sunk, you have two options: discard one card, or pick a fight with another player.



Discarding: There are four lifeboats, one for each suit. When you discard a card, you place it into the lifeboat of the appropriate suit, and your turn is over.

Fighting: To pick a fight, play a card in the center of the table, and declare who you are attacking. That player has two options: surrender and lose the fight, or play a card of higher rank than the card you played. (Suit doesn't matter at this point.) If he plays a higher card, you can respond with an even higher card if you have one. This continues until one player can't top the other and is forced to give up.

The winner draws a random card from the loser's hand. That card goes into the winner's "board," a face-up collection of cards on the table.

Board cards aren't part of you hand. You can't fight with them, discard them, or lose them in fights. They only help you in the Showdown.

After the fight ends, all the cards that were played in the fight get sorted by suit into the appropriate lifeboats. (Think of it as other pirates picking up all the stuff you dropped.)

Important Restriction: You cannot play the last card in your hand unless that card is a King. This rules ensures that the winner will always be able to draw a card from the loser's hand.

Pointless Restriction: You can't challenge a player who is holding no cards. You'd have nothing to draw, and you can achieve the same net effect by simply discarding a card. Besides, why attack a pirate you can't steal treasure from?

The Showdown: When the last card in the deck is drawn, the ship sinks. At this point, it's time for each player to bribe his way into a lifeboat. Each player plays one card from his hand, face down. This card is called the "Key Card." If your hand is empty, which is rare but possible, you go down with the ship and get no points for the round. The suit of the Key Card determines which lifeboat you run to. Once everyone has played a Key Card, reveal all the cards in everyone's hand.

If everyone went for a different lifeboat, scoring is easy. Each player gets the point value of the cards in that lifeboat. You do not score the cards in your hand, your Key Card, or your Board.

If more than one person went for the same lifeboat, only one player gets on. The points in the lifeboat go to the player who is holding more points in the appropriate suit, including his hand, his Board, and the Key Card. If there is a tie, the points go to the player who has the single highest card in that suit. Again, you score only the points in the lifeboat.

Example: It's a four-player Showdown. Player 1 plays a Spade, players 2 and 3 play Hearts, and player 4 plays nothing because his hand is empty. Player 1 gets the points in the Spade lifeboat, and player 4 gets nothing. Players 2 and 3 compare all the Hearts they hold: Player 2 has the 6H on his Board, played the QH as his Key, and holds no other Hearts. Player 3 had no Hearts on the Board, played the 2H as his Key, and held only the 3H and the 7H in his hand. Player 2 takes the lifeboat, with 18 points versus Player 3's12 points.

Winning: Play to 200 points. If two players break 200 on the same round, the player with the highest score wins. If two players are tied at the high score, they must engage in the embarrassing Caribbean Plank Walk tied together with a 10-foot rope and clenching sharp knives between their teeth.

Strategy: The cards you use in fights and as discards are crucial choices: Every card you play in this manner will wind up in a lifeboat. On the other hand, every card you win or lose in a fight will wind up in someone's Board. Early in the game, it helps to get a few cards into your Board, to give yourself some leverage in the Showdown. Later in the game, you must do what you can to make sure you have the Key Card to the right lifeboat. You will notice that the more valuable a lifeboat is, the fewer points it will take to get on it (the majority of that suit is in the lifeboat, and not in players' hands.) Also, it's usually better to get into a small lifeboat than to fight for a big one and lose. Learn to guess what the other players will probably go for, and play accordingly.

Variation for 6–8 Players: You can play *Abandon Ship* with as many as eight players by using a double deck. Deal eight hands regardless of how many players are in the game, and remove the unused hands from the game. If both players have a card of the same rank as their highest card in their Key Card suit during the Showdown, compare the second highest cards in each hand, then the third highest, and so on to resolve the tie. If tied hands are exactly identical, it's time to break out the 10-foot rope—or you can split the lifeboat total between the two tied players.

MIND FLAYERS

no. 14

by Mike Selinker

Here's a short quiz for the magically inclined. All we want to know is, what spell are you casting?

1 You've just swallowed a live spider.
2 You're figuring whether the room is at least 33,000 cubic feet.
3 You've crushed a pearl and have looked up the word "weal."
4 You're hoping that a storm shows up so you can use the spell.
5 You figure you can always get another *potion of superheroism.*
6 You've spent 5,000 gold pieces on a chest and its miniature replica.
7 You're using nine snakes as the material component.
8 You know you can count on support within 60 feet of the riverbank.
9 You don't know whether you'll get one, two, three, or four copies.
10 You've killed all small animals within a mile except for the imps.
11 You're making sure you stand 16 feet back from your spellcasting foe.
12 You're not letting anyone clean the crushed garlic off your feet.
13 You have a snow sculptor on retainer.
14 You may get some use out of the spikes you nailed into the ceiling.
15 You're hoping for human rather than, say, a badger.
16 You're certain it makes your vampire disguise *very* convincing.
17 You've moved all solid objects more than two feet away.
18 You prefer a *stinking cloud* in your foyer over a *gust of wind.*
19 You're planning to be out of the room before the five rounds are up.
20 You're hoping nobody decides to bury you while the spell is working.

The Heroes of Stormweather

The citizens of Selgaunt live by the Golden Rule: He Who Has the Gold Makes the Rules.

by The Sembia Seven

illustrated by Carl Critchlow

Gold and power are inseparable in the mercantile realm of Sembia. Within the walls of the nation's capital city, Selgaunt, the most wealthy and powerful have built a world of their own. There, the vast majority of the city's wealth is in the hands of just a few powerful families. Where most of the other realms of Faerûn have hereditary aristocracies based on some ancient birthright, the "nobility" of Selgaunt is only as stable as the coffers of its elite.

In the seemingly eternal struggle between wealthy houses, some families try to take the high road, making decisions and alliances for the general good. Much more common, unfortunately, are the families driven purely by greed and a desperate insistence on maintaining the status quo.

It's in the midst of this maelstrom of greed, back-stabbing, and often vicious intrigue that we find the Uskevren.

No one will make the mistake of saying that the Uskevren are a force for pure, altruistic good, but they are something of a beacon in a dark, Sembian night. Led by the honorable Thamalon, the Uskevren family has had to claw its way back up the economic ladder of Selgaunt from the most feared of fates—financial ruin. By Thamalon's strong mind, and often stronger hand, the Uskevren have reclaimed their rightful place among the Old Chauncel—the elite of Selgaunt.

Like most, if not all of the other great families of Selgaunt, the Uskevren are a mixed lot. The circles in which they travel makes even the youngest grow up fast, and responsibility is heavy on the shoulders of every Uskevren. Thamalon, with his strong and capable wife Shamur, has managed to raise a family that just might be able to carry on the family name—and just might make it stronger still in the decades to come.

They won't have an easy time of it to be sure; the streets of Selgaunt can be as dangerous as the streets of ruined Myth Drannor. There are a thousand plots, a thousand enemies, and a thousand dangers around every corner and in every fog-shrouded alleyway. The family will need each other—and more—just to stay alive.

To launch the new FORGOTTEN REALMS® *series, editor Phil Athans assembled the Sembia Seven: Ed Greenwood, Richard Lee Byers, Paul Kemp, Voronica Whitney-Robinson, Dave Gross, Paul Kemp, and Clayton Emery.*

Thamalon Uskevren

MALE HUMAN, 12TH-LEVEL FIGHTER			
Strength	13 (+1)	Fortitude Save	+10
Dexterity	15 (+2)	Reflex Save	+6
Constitution	15 (+2)	Will Save	+9
Intelligence	17 (+3)	Alignment	LN
Wisdom	17 (+3)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	16 (+3)	Size	M (5 ft. 9 in.)
Armor Class	17	Melee Attack	+13/+8/+3
Hit Points	88	Ranged Attack	+14/+9/+4

Skills: Appraise +6, Climb +8, Concentration +5, Diplomacy +10, Handle Animal +10, Intimidate +6, Jump +8, Knowledge (Sembian history) +6, Listen +5, Profession (winegrower) +8, Ride +10, Spellcraft +4, Swim +8.

Feats: Alertness, Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Iron Will, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (dagger), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (dagger), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Languages: Common, Elven.

Possessions: Scale mail armor, buckler, *+1 dagger* (silver-plated with the powers of a *wand of illumination*), *ring of regeneration*, *ring of the ram*. The Uskevren vaults hold much minor magic (mostly blades and protective rings and amulets), so before important dealings, he might don a *medallion of ESP* and carry a *ring of invisibility* on a wrist-chain.

Appearance: Though he's seen over 60 winters (he was born Mirtul 4, in 1307 D.R., the same year as Azoun IV of Cormyr), Thamalon is weatherbeaten and beginning to stoop, but still in fine trim. He has deep green eyes that blaze when he's angry, scowling black brows, and short, wavy, snow-white hair.

Thamalon is customarily conservatively well-dressed, yet he isn't fussy about clothing. He's a graceful dancer but has a rather stiff, deliberate walk. When he desires, he can dominate a room with a majestic manner. When thinking, he often taps his chin with a forefinger.

Background: The patriarch of the Uskevren family is the younger son of Aldimar Uskevren and his first wife, Balantra. A worshipper of Waukeen, Valkur, and Tymora, he follows no faith devoutly. He has traded and traveled in Cormyr, Westgate, the Dales, throughout Sembia, and around the Moonsea; hunted boar and stag in the Dales, the Hullack Forest, and the Tilver backlands—and slowly rebuilt the Uskevren name and wealth from the shame and ruin of public revelations of his father's pirate dealings. He dotes on his wife, Shamur, and wishes she loved him as fervently.

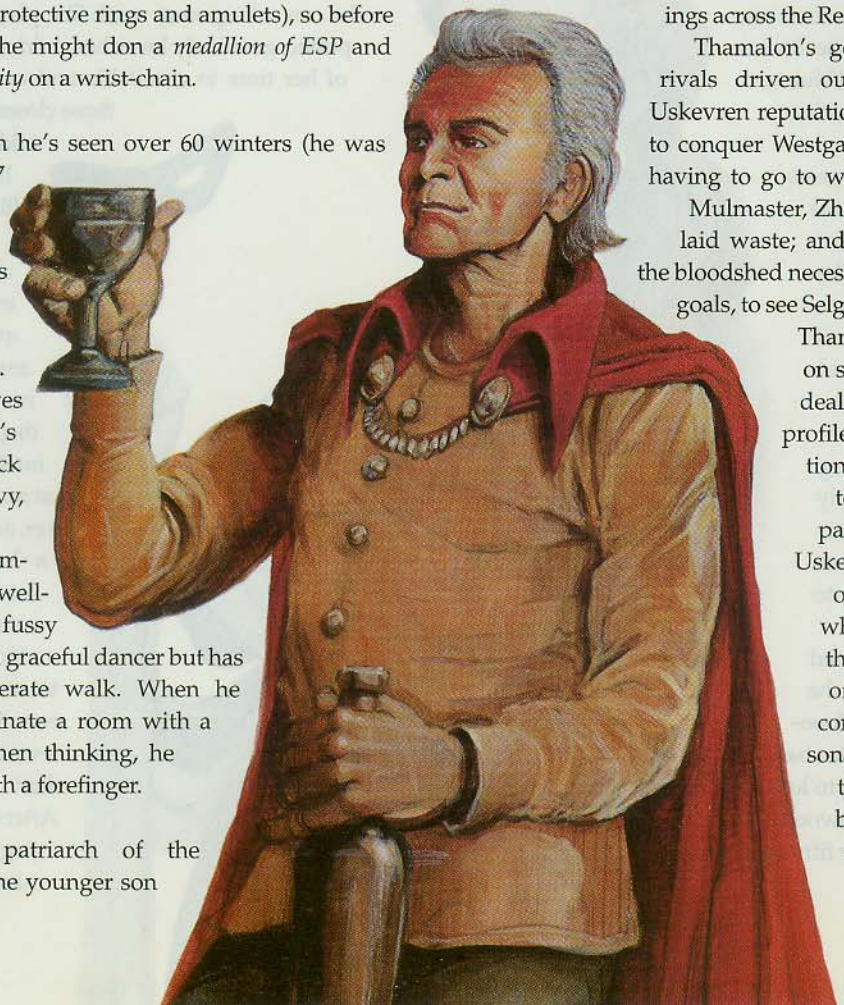
Roleplaying Notes: The Uskevren family is prosperous and highly regarded in Sembia almost entirely due to Thamalon's honesty, fearless dealings, and quick business wits. He prefers quiet, grave, well-chosen words to bluster, and he doesn't think himself too grand to ignore a youngster or the lowliest of laborers.

Rather than collecting the vintages of others, Thamalon makes his own wines. Thus far he has three successes: a good clarry that he keeps in vast quantities and calls "Usk Fine Old"; a fiery straw-hued pear wine, "Thamalon's Own"; and a sweet, fortified dessert wine, "Storm Ruby."

Thamalon is also interested in the Elven Court and the vanished glories of Myth Drannor, and he dreams of seeing the elves return on cordial terms with Sembian humans. The head of House Uskevren also collects chapbooks and small tomes from all over Faerûn. He intends to found a publishing house to spread Sembian writings across the Realms.

Thamalon's goals are to see certain rivals driven out of Sembia and the Uskevren reputation restored; for Sembia to conquer Westgate and Hillsfar without having to go to war with Cormyr; to see Mulmaster, Zhentil Keep, and Calaunt laid waste; and, above all, throughout the bloodshed necessary to accomplish these goals, to see Selgaunt kept prosperous.

Thamalon long ago decided on strict honesty in all trade dealings and to avoid a high profile, working by manipulation and silent-backer roles to accomplish his goals patiently. He believes the Uskevren must exact their own justice from those who cheat or strike against them, regardless of laws or authorities—but also considers living by a personal code more important than defeating foes and business opponents by any possible means.



Shamur Uskevren

FEMALE HUMAN, 13TH-LEVEL ROGUE			
Strength	14 (+2)	Fortitude Save	+7
Dexterity	18 (+4)	Reflex Save	+12
Constitution	16 (+3)	Will Save	+5
Intelligence	15 (+2)	Alignment	NG
Wisdom	13 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	16 (+3)	Size	M (5 ft. 11 in.)
Armor Class	14	Melee Attack	+11/+6
Hit Points	80	Ranged Attack	+13/+8

Skills: Balance +14, Bluff +15, Climb +15, Diplomacy +19, Disable Device +20, Gather Information +12, Hide +17, Innuendo +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +20, Open Locks +14, Pick Pockets +9, Ride +10, Search +12, Sense Motive +8, Spot +14.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Disarm, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), and Weapon Focus (longsword).

Special: Sneak Attack +7d6, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge, Improved Evasion, Slippery Mind.

Appearance: Shamur is an attractive woman in her forties. She has a fair complexion; long, pale-blond hair; and lustrous gray eyes. She appears younger than her age, but her austere manner can make her seem older. She favors conservative and tasteful blue and gray outfits and silver jewelry.

Background: Born 97 years ago, Shamur was the daughter of the merchant noble Javis Karn. From the cradle she was bold, curious, mischievous, fond of physical challenges, and inclined to flout authority. While in her teens she secretly became a daring and notorious thief, purely for the excitement. Unfortunately, her identity was exposed, and she had to flee the city.

Afterward, she wandered the Dalelands and the southern shores of the Moonsea, where she fell in with a band of adventurers planning to loot a ruin in the forests south of Elmwood. There, a magical accident sent her fifty years forward in time.

Now friendless and disoriented, Shamur slipped back into Selgaunt to visit her family. Once home, she learned she had a grand-niece. This girl too was called Shamur and was a dead ringer for her namesake. She also represented the Karns' only hope of averting ruin. Many of their commercial ventures had failed, leaving them on the brink of bankruptcy. The only solution was an alliance by marriage with another merchant house. Luckily, the wealthy trader Thamalon Uskevren had asked for the hand of the younger Shamur, but then the girl fell mysteriously ill and died.

Desperate, the Karns hit on an outrageous scheme to save the family fortunes. The world was unaware of Shamur's return, so the family concealed the younger Shamur's death to let her grand-aunt assume her identity. At first, Shamur wanted no part of such a scheme. How could she, who had always followed her heart, bear to enter into a loveless union with a stranger? Even worse, how could she abandon the adventurous life she relished?

Yet she couldn't permit her family's downfall, so Shamur consented to the masquerade and married Thamalon, who, shrewd though he is, never recognized her as an impostor. Shamur threw herself into the role of matriarch of a wealthy house with cheerless zeal, and she continues the charade today.

Roleplaying Notes: Encountered under normal circumstances, Shamur seems a typical noblewoman: dignified, proper, and courteous, though with a dry, devastating wit she can call upon at need. She plays the dutiful wife in public, genuinely loves her children, and devotes much of her time to charitable and cultural pursuits. Only those closest to her have even an inkling that she finds her life wretchedly unfulfilling.

In a dangerous situation, Shamur does everything possible to avoid revealing her true prowess. She has no compunctions about displaying her courage, intelligence, or adroitness at managing people, however, and is likely to assume a leadership role or at least offer shrewd tactical suggestions.

If absolutely compelled to reveal her hidden talents, Shamur might briefly revert to the merry, impudent daredevil of yore. Afterward, however, she doggedly resumes her masquerade.

Thamalon "Tamlin" Uskevren II

MALE HUMAN, 2ND-LEVEL FIGHTER			
Strength	6 (–2)	Fortitude Save	+3
Dexterity	13 (+1)	Reflex Save	+1
Constitution	11 (+0)	Will Save	+1
Intelligence	13 (+1)	Alignment	NG
Wisdom	12 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	15 (+2)	Size	M (5 ft. 9 in.)
Armor Class:	11	Melee Attack	+0
Hit Points:	15	Ranged Attack	+3

Skills: Bluff +4, Climb +3, Diplomacy +4, Jump +1, Ride +6.

Feats: Dodge, Mobility, Mounted Combat, Quick Draw.

Possessions: Some of his gimcracks glow in the dark, and one talks (babbles), but the rest are worthless.

Appearance: Tamlin takes after his father, at least externally. Middling height and size, well set up, Tamlin has wavy dark hair to his shoulders and deep green eyes. He dresses in the latest fashions, and because of his highborn status, often *is* the latest fashion. He favors floppy hats, silk doublets, kid gloves, short capes, and brilliant hose. His clothes are often festooned with good luck charms. He wears a fashionable baldric and sword, unless he's left it in a pub somewhere.

Background: Handsome, well-bred, polite, intelligent, honest, loyal, and kind, Tamlin Uskevren is everything a young noble should be. Yet because he's an heir, he's also lazy, vain, aimless, dozy, spendthrift, foppish, moody, and pampered. Given everything, he gives nothing in return. Slack about his studies, never on time, and easily distracted, he falls asleep when forced to attend business meetings but will announce his rash and misinformed opinions on any topic. Tamlin has been accused of having designs on his father's "empire," but the rumors are untrue: Tamlin has no designs whatsoever. If he lives long enough, and doesn't outrage his father to disinherit him, he'll gain the Uskevren fortunes, the ancestral home of Stormweather Towers, their farmlands and vinyards, ships, contracts and business contacts, and far more. Born in the Year of the Saddle (1345 D.R.), only lately has Tamlin begun to feel dissatisfied. Parties pall, women sound shrill, food and wine taste flat, life loses its luster. These first faint stirrings of needing *something*, some purpose, are in fact a burgeoning maturity. His parents are sure Tamlin harbors "hidden talents" and will "grow into his father's boots," and he might indeed.

Roleplaying Notes: Tamlin never rises before noon, dawdles away the afternoon, and parties all night. He buys rounds for friends and strangers alike, wanders into plays and dances, and, as one of Selgaunt's most eligible bachelors, has to shake the gigglier sex off both arms. Tamlin is superstitious and paranoid, so he wears talismans and exhibits stubborn and arbitrary quirks: He won't walk on red floors, never goes through a doorway first, assumes food is poisoned, never bets on the first hand, never exits through the same door he entered, frets about random events such as a beggar's attention, and so on.

Tamlin is always accompanied by two "keepers." His only real friends, they call him "Deuce."

- Vox (human Bbn 6) is a black-haired brute, one-eighth orcish, Tamlin's fight instructor and bodyguard, and a mute who communicates by private signs..
- Escevar (human Ftr 3/Rog 1) is a fair and freckled rascal who was originally Tamlin's whipping boy and is now his secretary.

Being filthy rich, and an instrument in Sembia's shady cut-throat business world, Tamlin is a prime target. "Foreign" kidnappers might grab him for ransom while "homegrown" business rivals might just salt him away for a while. Lately, assassins plague the streets, and Vox and Escevar earn their money keeping him alive. Tamlin also attracts grifters seeking money, usually with some hare-brained scheme, and occasionally Tamlin researches his "investment," which leads him into dangerous company. He's liable to patronize a bargirl or doxy and wake up in unsavory hovels, but he is equally liable to wake up in some noblewoman's bed without her husband's permission. Tamlin never ignores a chance to torment his sister or brother, and will follow them for a lark, heckling Tal while on stage, or sneaking after Tazi while she scouts a theft.

Thazienne "Tazi" Uskevren

FEMALE HUMAN, 7TH-LEVEL ROGUE			
Strength	10 (+0)	Fortitude Save	+3
Dexterity	16 (+3)	Reflex Save	+10
Constitution	12 (+1)	Will Save	+3
Intelligence	14 (+2)	Alignment	CN
Wisdom	13 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	18 (+4)	Size	M (5 ft. 8 in.)
Armor Class	13	Melee Attack	+5
Hit Points	40	Ranged Attack	+8

Skills: Bluff +14, Diplomacy +13, Disable Device +13, Disguise +12, Intuit Direction +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +13, Open Locks +13, Perform +13, Pick Pockets +13, Ride +8, Spot +9, Tumbling +8.

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Weapon Finesse (rapier), Lightning Reflexes.

Special: Sneak attack +4d6, Evasion, Uncanny dodge.

Possessions: Thazienne always wears an emerald ring enchanted with *protection from evil*. When the command word is spoken, the ring produces a pale gray shield that prevents magical attacks from harming its owner. However, invoking this power reduces the wearer's Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity scores by half for 24 hours.

At night, Tazi wears supple black leather and carries a dagger in her right boot and a rapier at her hip, as well as a set of wire lock picks strapped to her forearm.

Appearance: Twenty-one year old Tazi is the kind of pretty girl who will have a heart-stopping beauty in maturity. She is tall and slim with an athletic build. Her sea-green eyes shine out of her smooth face, and her coal-black hair is a sharp contrast to her honey-colored skin. She recently cut her waist-length hair to a much shorter style. Ostensibly the reason was because the shorter length is popular in Cormyr. The real reason was twofold: It annoyed her mother greatly, and the length was now much more convenient for her nocturnal activities.

When in the company of her family or any gathering of Selgaunt elite, Tazi prefers to wear the fashions of Cormyr. Long full skirts, flat boots, fitted breastpieces, and tight sleeves are her favorites. When night falls, her dress is very different.

Background: Born in 1349 D.R., Tazi is the middle child and only daughter of Thamalon and Shamur Uskevren. At an early age, Tazi preferred not to play in the halls of her home but to follow her older brother and his friends on their many excursions into the city. After a few weeks of her brother using his fists to convince her she was not wanted, Tazi began, at the age of ten, to explore the city on her own. Naturally, a pretty child on her own garnered some unwanted attention, but she rose to the occasion and protected herself well, stabbing the first potential rapist who crossed her path. Soon after that, she purchased and began carrying a small dagger, not to mention disguising herself in more tattered, ragged clothing. While she did not avoid the more traditional schooling and training expected of a girl of Tazi's station, she enjoyed her self-taught lessons best.

As Tazi outgrew stealing from her own household, she graduated to picking the pockets of the wealthy. Most recently, she has moved on to cat burglary, robbing the very peers with whom her parents have her dine. Few of her friends know of her evening escapades, but she occasionally allows a young mage named Steorf to accompany her. Of her family, only the butler, Erevis Cale, knows of what she does. When she was younger, he gave her some training and advice for the road she had chosen, and Tazi trusts him enough to tell of her "wildings" over a glass of the brandy he keeps in the pantry.

Roleplaying Notes: Since a young girl, Tazi has proven to have a contrary nature. One day she might save a foundling baby and leave it in the care of a temple, and the next would find her stealing silver from her own estates. She enjoys disruption for its own sake, but some have noticed that she carries the seeds of maturity within her. The butler sees these qualities in her, and even her own father recognizes that she is the logical choice as heir to the family business.

MALE HUMAN, 7TH-LEVEL FIGHTER			
Strength	17 (+3)	Fortitude Save	+8
Dexterity	15 (+2)	Reflex Save	+4
Constitution	16 (+3)	Will Save	+1
Intelligence	13 (+1)	Alignment	CG
Wisdom	9 (–1)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	14 (+2)	Size	M (6 ft. 3 in.)
Armor Class	12	Melee Attack	+10/+5
HP	58	Ranged Attack	+9/+4

Skills: Bluff +7, Intimidate +7, Jump +13, Perform (ballad, buffooner, comedy, drama, epic) +7.

Feats: Dodge, Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack.

Possessions: Except during sword practice, Tal rarely carries a weapon other than a dagger. While he owns no magic items, he won't hesitate to borrow an enchanted blade from the family armory if the situation calls for it. He usually fills a purse with coins each morning, which dribble into the hands of beggars, entertainers, and alehouse owners throughout the day until it's empty.

Appearance: At first glance, Tal doesn't look much like an Uskevren. He's tall and broad, with a massive jaw and rather large hands. A closer look reveals a hint of his father's thick brows and strong nose—whom he resembles more than he admits—while his gray eyes are a gift from his mother. When standing beside his siblings, he looks more like a cousin than a brother, at least at first glance.

Tal usually wears fine if somewhat plain clothing, reinforcing his likeness to Thamalon and (to a lesser extent) Tamlin.

Background: The third child of Thamalon and Shamur (born in 1351 D.R.), Tal thinks of himself as the black sheep of the family. While he's not as dissolute as Tamlin, he somehow manages to feel all the more guilty when he ends up in the city jail or on the dirty side of public gossip.

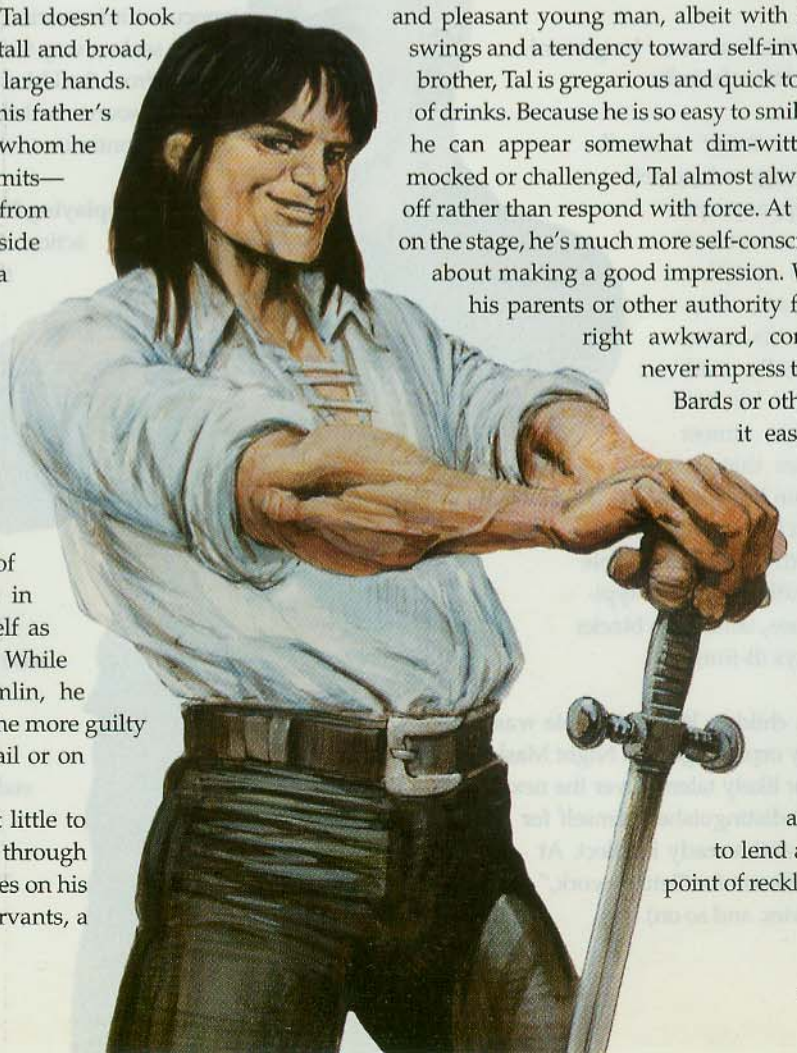
Growing up wealthy meant little to Tal, who found himself lonely through much of his childhood. He dotes on his sister and one of the house servants, a maid named Larajin, but otherwise feels out of place in House Uskevren. He avoids his brother, whose brutish bodyguard he hates, and he never feels comfortable when under his parents' gaze, always fearing that he is a disappointment to them. He admires Erevis Cale but finds the man's talent for knowing of things before they are revealed rather frightening.

Tal rarely spends time at Stormweather Towers, preferring his tallhouse in central Selgaunt. He even avoids this home away from home, since with the tallhouse came Eckert, an unctuous and often supercilious servant whom Tal suspects is actually a spy for Thamalon. Instead, Tal can usually be found at the Wide Realms theater, where he plays bit parts and devises the sword-fighting choreography. After hours, he carouses with his best friend, Chaney Foxmantle, a notorious scoundrel whose company is scorned by all proper young nobles.

Among the students at Master Ferrick's School of Blades, Tal ranks barely above the median of his thirty-seven peers. In his mind, that status makes him a mediocre fighter, but what he fails to reckon is that Ferrick's students comprise the finest swordsmen in Selgaunt. Because of the school's reputation, Tal generally goes unarmed for fear that he'd accidentally kill someone in a duel. On the other hand, he has no compunctions about giving a scoundrel a sound thrashing—as proven by his frequent tavern brawls.

Roleplaying Notes: Tal usually comes across as an easy-going and pleasant young man, albeit with inexplicable mood swings and a tendency toward self-involvement. Like his brother, Tal is gregarious and quick to spring for a round of drinks. Because he is so easy to smile or laugh at a joke, he can appear somewhat dim-witted at first. When mocked or challenged, Tal almost always tries to shrug it off rather than respond with force. At Master Ferrick's or on the stage, he's much more self-conscious and concerned about making a good impression. When dealing with his parents or other authority figures, he's downright awkward, convinced that he'll never impress them.

Bards or other performers find it easy to befriend Tal, who is quick to drop a handful of coins in a busker's hat or to pay for a story. If invited to help in what seems like a worthy cause ("Hey, our friend is being robbed in that alley!"), he's quick to lend a hand, even to the point of recklessness.



Erevis Cale

MALE HUMAN, 8TH-LEVEL ROGUE, 3RD-LEVEL FIGHTER			
Strength	17 (+3)	Fortitude Save	+6
Dexterity	16 (+3)	Reflex Save	+10
Constitution	13 (+1)	Will Save	+4
Intelligence	17 (+3)	Alignment	LN
Wisdom	12 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	12 (+1)	Size	M (6 ft. 2 in.)
Armor Class	15	Melee Attack	+12/+7
Hit Points	60	Ranged Attack	+12/+7

Skills: Bluff +12, Climb +14, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +11, Disable Device +8, Disguise +12, Forgery +8, Gather Information +12, Hide +14, Jump +6, Knowledge (Selgaunt underworld) +11, Listen +12, Move Silently +14, Open Lock +8, Read Lips +7, Search +8, Spot +10, Use Rope +8, Profession (butler) +5.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack.

Special: Sneak Attack +4d6, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge.

Languages: Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant.

Possessions: Leather armor, longsword, *potion of healing, necklace of missiles.*

Appearance: Cale's inner turmoil manifests in his visage—deep-set, shadowed eyes appear perpetually troubled; cavernous cheeks cut valleys on either side of his pale face; deep worry lines crease his brow, contrasting markedly with the smooth skin of his bald pate. Only the rare, almost embarrassed smiles that occasionally part his thin lips soften his expression enough to reveal that he is but thirty years old. Dutiful in his role as the Uskevren butler, he wears typical Sembian fashions, usually in blacks or grays, and always ill-fitting.

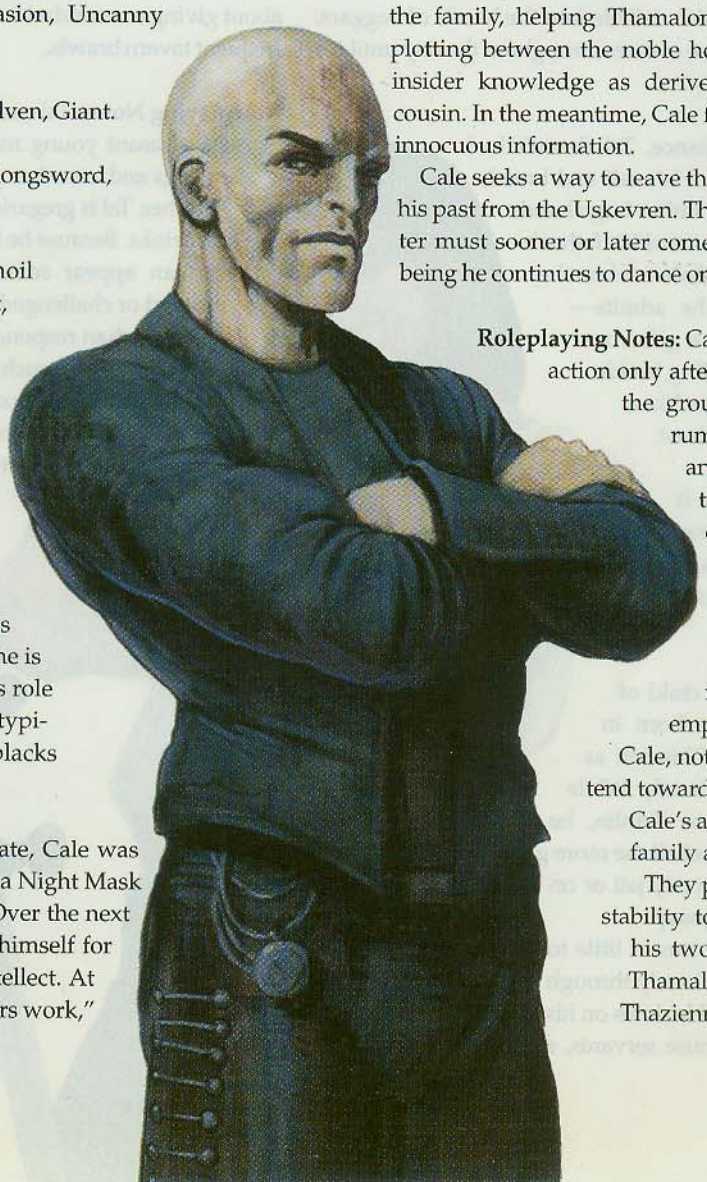
Background: As a child in Westgate, Cale was plucked from a city orphanage by a Night Mask "culler" looking for likely talent. Over the next several years, Cale distinguished himself for skilled bladework and a ready intellect. At seventeen, he was chosen for "letters work," (translations, forgeries, and so on).

After this training, Cale joined a cell of thieves, pulled off several successful jobs, and quickly rose through the ranks. Among his cohorts were such criminals as Jeldis the tall, "Thumbs" Corinstar, Askaxon Fel, and Belifor Steelaxe. Despite his success, however, he found himself dissatisfied with the life of an assassin and thief. To prepare a break from the guild, he began embezzling funds. When guild enforcers began to close in, he narrowly escaped across the sea to Sembia. Buying passage on *Wave Runner*, he debarked on a wharf in Selgaunt, determined to begin a new life.

Taking stock of Selgaunt's underworld, Cale decided to join the Night Knives, a rising power headed by a mysterious priest of Mask known only as the Righteous Man. Presenting himself as an independent operator, Cale soon became the Righteous Man's chief lieutenant. Cale's only rival for the guildmaster's favor was a one-eyed, sinister assassin named Drasek Riven.

As part of an elaborate blackmail operation, the Night Knives began infiltrating Selgaunt's merchant nobles to glean useful family secrets. To get dirt on Thamalon, Cale insinuated himself into Stormweather Towers as the family's butler. The scheme began to fall apart when Cale developed an affection for the Uskevren. Within months, Cale threw in his lot with the family, helping Thamalon navigate the constant plotting between the noble houses. Cale explains his insider knowledge as derived from a disreputable cousin. In the meantime, Cale feeds the Righteous Man innocuous information.

Cale seeks a way to leave the guild while concealing his past from the Uskevren. Though he knows the matter must sooner or later come to a head, for the time being he continues to dance on the edge of the sword.



Roleplaying Notes: Cale is a thinker who takes action only after wrestling a problem to the ground. In this respect, he ruminates on his life of lies and is prone to recrimination and guilt. Once he determines that action is warranted, he moves quickly, with total dedication and complete disregard for the morality of the means employed. Ends matter to Cale, not means, so his solutions tend toward violence.

Cale's anchors are the Uskevren family and his friend, Jak Fleet. They provide him just enough stability to allow him to balance his two halves. His loyalty to Thamalon and affection for Thazienne are unshakable.

FEMALE HALF-ELF, 1ST-LEVEL CLERIC			
Strength	10 (+0)	Fortitude Save	+4
Dexterity	16 (+3)	Reflex Save	+3
Constitution	15 (+2)	Will Save	+5
Intelligence	14 (+2)	Alignment	NG
Wisdom	16 (+3)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	14 (+2)	Size	M (5 ft. 7 in.)
Armor Class	13	Melee Attack	+0
Hit Points	12	Ranged Attack	+3

Skills: Concentration +6, Diplomacy +4, Heal +7, Perform (singing, illustration) +4, Swim +1.

Feats: Dodge.

Special: Immune to *sleep* spells and similar effects, +2 racial saving throw bonus vs. Enchantment spells and effects, low-light vision, +1 racial bonus to Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Appearance: Larajin is an athletic girl in her early twenties, with rust colored hair and hazel eyes so pale they are almost yellow. Although she is a half-elf, she appears more human than elven, with rounded ears and a human face.

As a servant of House Uskevren, Larajin wore the household uniform: a white knee-length dress with sleeves slashed to show the Uskevren colors; a tight-fitting gold vest, laced up the front with black velvet ribbon; soft black velvet slippers; and a gold turban wrap that hid her hair, hung with tinkling silver bells to announce a servant's presence in a room.

Because she is a 1st-level priest of both a human goddess (Sune) and an elven goddess (Hanali Celanil) she has adopted her own priestly garb: the red robes of Sune, embroidered with the gold hearts of Hanali Celanil.

Spells: Larajin draws her priestly powers both from the elven deity Hanali Celanil, goddess of romance and beauty, and from the human deity Sune, goddess of love. When casting spells granted by Hanali Celanil, the smell of flowers surrounds Larajin. When this happens, Larajin's Charisma is increased by two points. When casting spells granted by Sune, a red glow emanates from Larajin's hands.

Background: Larajin grew up in the Uskevren household as a servant looking in from the outside rather than as a family member. Her one friend in the household was Talbot, the younger son.

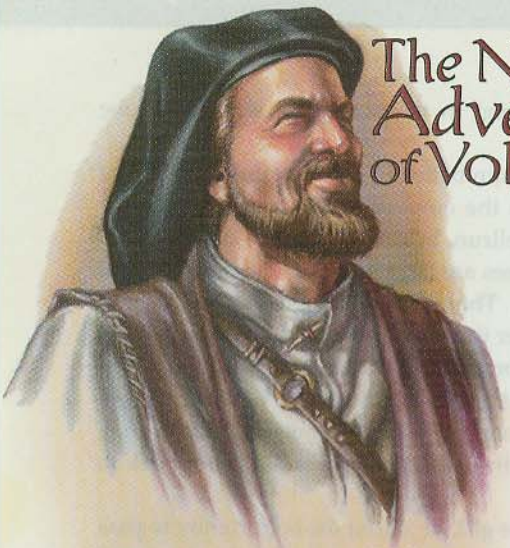
Until recently, Larajin believed she was the daughter of an elderly couple in the employ of Thamalon Uskevren, Thalit and Shonri Wellrun. In reality, Thamalon and a wild elf of the Tangled Trees are her parents. Nine months after their first dalliance, Thamalon returned to the Tangled Trees, only to discover that his lover had died during childbirth. Fortunately for the half-elven Larajin, Shonri had recently given birth to a stillborn infant. When the elves gave the infant to Shonri to suckle, Thamalon assumed they were giving Larajin into his care and brought her back to Selgaunt.

Wanting to keep the girl, he seized the opportunity to pass the infant off as Shonri's newborn daughter. A loyal servant, Shonri kept Larajin's secret to herself. Shonri passed the child off as her own, not even telling her husband Thalit the truth. The elves never intended that Larajin be removed from the forest. According to elven lore, hers was a special birth, and she is marked for some great destiny. After spying on her for some time, they at last saw a sign of priestly powers rising in her. Recently, a radical faction of the elven court attempted to kidnap Larajin and take her to the Tangled Trees.

As a result, Larajin discovered her half-elven heritage, and has set out on an adventure to find out more about her past.

Roleplaying Notes: Despite working all of her life as a servant, Larajin is at a loss to grasp the complicated etiquette of the merchant class. She's polite but has an unfortunate propensity for saying whatever is on her mind. That she is so obviously innocent of malice has thus far saved her from repercussions.

Tressym: Larajin has a pet tressym that, in the manner of felines, has chosen to follow her everywhere and occasionally obey her instructions. It has sleek, blue-gray fur and wings as colorful as a peacock's. Larajin found the tressym in the Hunting Garden of the Hurlorn (the ruler of Selgaunt) and used her priestly powers to heal its broken wing. Larajin has named the animal Goldheart, a reference both to its golden eyes and to the holy symbol of Hanali Celanil, goddess of beauty.



The New Adventures of Volo

By Ed Greenwood
Illustrated by Ron Spencer

The House of Stone

Volothamp Geddarm, at your service once more, gentles, setting truths of the Realms before you like gems sparkling on a platter. This day I write of a place well known, but not so well known as most think they know it, if you follow me.

Many a minstrel, for as long as I've fared forth across the Realms and longer, has won himself a good meal and attentive ears in a wayside inn or village tavern with news, real or spun out of his fancy, of the latest dread monsters and doomed adventurers to clash in the House of Stone. This fortress, if half such tales be true, must now be buried waist-deep, every chamber and passage of it, with the bones of adventurers who stormed in. It is a gigantic trap for the restless, lawless sorts who seek glory, some say, or a bloody arena for the amusement of invisible wizards, giants, or fiends, others claim.

I, Volo, now know that the truth is rather different.[1] Hearken, then, as I say more of the House of Stone.

What All Know Eye Behelds

I have it on the best of authority[2] that this massive fortress is, as many believe, the largest and most impressive remnant of the Fallen Kingdom. Thanks to centuries of bardic ballads, rhymes, and jokes of the Sword Coast North, folk from Baldur's Gate to Icewind Dale have heard of it. Most of them think it either some sort of trap for adventurers or an overblown, wasteful folly. In older days, many thought it the fortified entry to an underground city of undead, brigands horribly transformed by magic, or even an enclave of beholders.[3]

All of the tales agree that it is a huge, square stone building, and that its interior bristles with traps that have slain a wide assortment of creatures. So much is true; the House is built of massive stone blocks and has walls dozens of feet thick, most of which are honeycombed with a labyrinth of passages painfully narrow to humans. It is a "disordered"[4] maze of rooms in various states of furnishing and repair (some shattered by long-ago battles or roof collapses that now leave them open to the sky), roamed by monsters and watched by vultures. Many of the rooms have been pillaged or have hosted fires. These rooms are bare save for the occasional falls of rubble and features too massive to obliterate or carry off. Such fixtures include support pillars (many of which are intricately carved and containing hidden storage niches—some large enough for lone adventurers

Elminster's Notes:

1. Aye, and that's almost all he knows. I've trimmed the worst of the errant nonsense he set down herein, and I've corrected the errors that mattered but left the, ah, "glories" of the House for adventurers to discover for themselves . . . else their forays'd not be "adventures" now, would they?

2. By which phrase the esteemed worm Volo always means he copied the notes of people who impress him—in this case, Khelben, Laeral, certain Heralds, the monks of Candlekeep—oh, and those of your obedient servant, myself. He left fragments of the wheel of cheese he was eating at the time all over my notes, but I took my revenge. For a tenday, every privy seat he sat down on seemed for some inexplicable reason to be covered in green gooseberry jelly. He still looks behind him ere he sits these days—every time. That's what it means to wield the power of an archmage.

3. Though Volo knows it not, all of these roles of the city he recounts here have, at one time or another, been wholly or partially true. Look at many a legend, and ye'll find truth disguised beneath a borrowed cloak of amplification and lies.

4. Volo here quotes the long-dead adventurer Raethrus of Myratma without knowing whose word he's borrowed, or that Raethrus referred to two things: The rooms of the House are of widely varying dimensions and styles, with ceiling heights changing often, and open one into another without any hint of a pattern or repetitive or logical layout. Additionally, from visit to visit, the layout of the House undeniably changes. Some have held this to be the result of magic or an extra-dimensional effect; I've even heard sages who should know better burble about the "time bending" effect that holds sway in the House. The truth lies in the rearrangement of sliding walls by certain of the inhabitants, coupled with occasional destructive remodeling.

5. Have ye heard the old saying "Legends speak true"? In this case, at least, they do. Many riches have been carried off, but I know of enchanted blades that can spit lightning bolts and send their wielders through dimension doors that went into yon house and have not been seen in battle since. There was a suit of elven plate armor, too, that gleams in my mind: small and fantastically fluted, a thing made for looks, not battle, belonging to a princess, Iravralee, long since dust. Studded with cabochon-cut sapphires so thickly that she looked drenched with drops of some clinging blue rain when she wore it. Hmmph—it's in there yet, I'll be bound. 6. Let me say this more strongly: 'Tis truly unwise to attempt to enter or leave the House of Stone by means of teleport or suchlike magics. Some such attempts will result in random destinations (such as, in two recent cases, a slippery rooftop in Secomber and a wardog-guarded private ladies' garden in a Waterdhavian nobles' villa) or in detours into sequences of traps in passages deep beneath the House.

7. Volo is an unlettered dolt. Know ye that "Asmaeringlol" can be rendered into plain Common as "Giantgout." The suffix "glol" means "large [body of] water" in both the hobgoblin and bugbear tongues.

to hide in) and statues, the latter usually depicting fearless muscled and armored heroes (usually elves or minotaurs, but sometimes humans or orcs).

Some adventurers have described rooms that rise and fall in shafts, many hidden doors, and rooms that contain silent, ever-hurrying phantoms of armed elves, dwarves, and men. Others speak of chambers that hold small forests of trees wrought of silver, yet seemingly alive, chiming as their leaves are set rustling. Such metal seems to banish tarnish when other silver is touched to it but darkens to dust when severed from its parent tree.[5]

For many years the elves of Ardeep stood guard over the House, their patrols employing aerial steeds, stealthy archers with sleepfast-tipped arrows, and valiant warriors with longswords that bore puissant enchantments. They let no creature approach it and gave no reason for doing so; when strongly challenged, they had some means of contacting powerful elven mages who would arrive in haste to turn away the would-be intruders.

In recent years, the elven population has dwindled in Ardeep, and they no longer stand guard over the House. Adventurers have rushed in to explore it, and most have promptly disappeared therein. The few survivors speak of a wild variety of encountered traps and monsters. Their accounts of room layouts vary, too. Magical fields about the House represent many internal permanent—but possibly intermittently operating—teleportation links that are known to prevent accurate translocational journeys into or out of the House.[6]

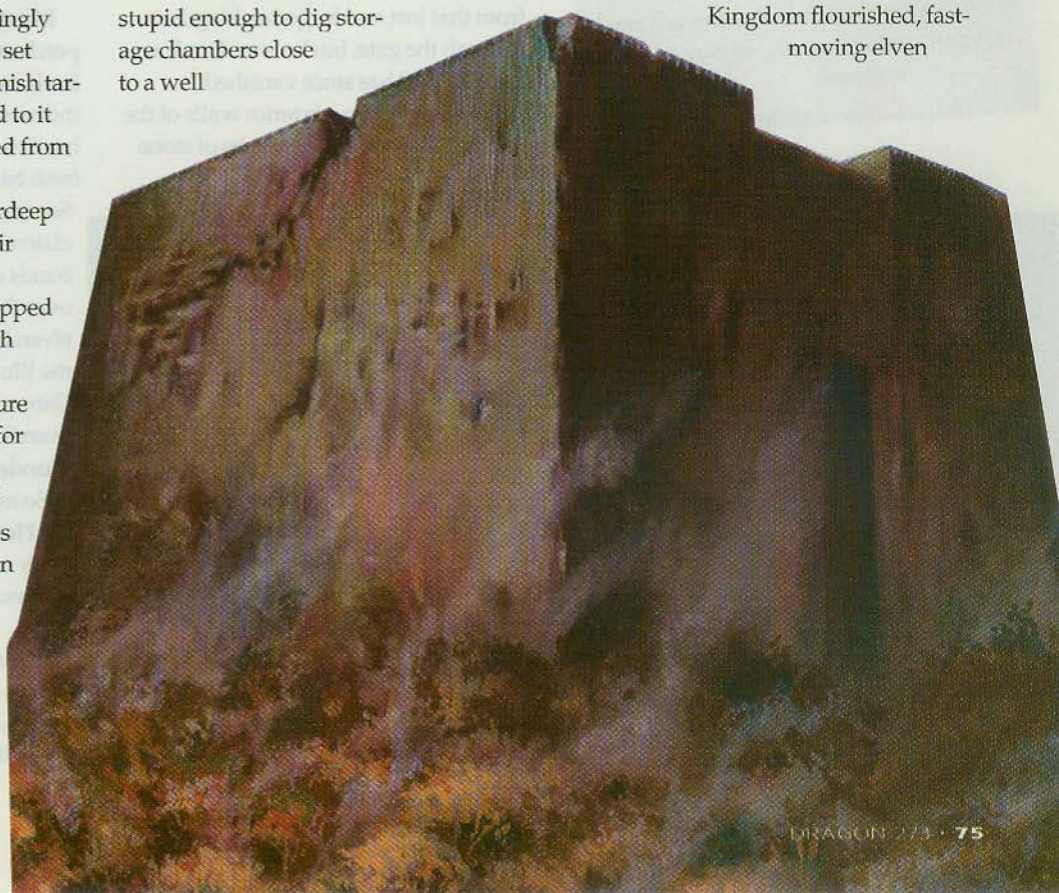
The History of the House

The original name of the House—or rather, of the more modest fortress that was its beginning—was Stoneturn. It was built to defend Stoneturn Well, a drinking water shaft that still exists at the heart of the abandoned fortress. The waters of Stoneturn spring from a deep subterranean lake known to local inhabitants of the Underdark as Asmaeringlol.[7] This lake is a deep column of water heated by volcanic flows at its nether depths and thus both full of life and always circulating. Whenever foolish intruders break into the wellshaft from one of the adjoining granary-caverns of the fortress, that level of the House of Stone is rapidly flooded. Thankfully, it doesn't happen often, as breaking through these walls requires a lot of effort. (The dwarves weren't stupid enough to dig storage chambers close to a well shaft containing water under pressure.)

The House of Stone today has no garrison except a few undead. It is roamed by many monsters that continually find their ways up from the lightless world through the dozens of routes that various intruders have created over the years by breaking through from the Underdark into House storage chambers. The surface "open rooms" and internal courtyards are home to both ghouls and a large number of shadows, but they seldom venture far into the inner chambers unless pursuing prey.

Such prey, of course, almost always consists of adventurers. Those intrepid enough to hack their ways through a dozen handfuls of ghouls and a small legion of shadows and penetrate into the inner chambers of the House of Stone will discover that it is dusty, empty, and crumbling—but that the myriad interconnected rooms sport so many traps that every step brings potential peril. That is the secret of the House: Only passages running inside the outermost walls, in the undercellars, and the shafts linking these two levels are safe to traverse. The rest of the place is one gigantic orcslaying trap, built to give the vast orc hordes that used to sweep down the Dessarin from the northern mountains a place to attack—and a place to die.

In the days when the Fallen Kingdom flourished, fast-moving elven



8. No. Volo didn't forget to tell ye his name. The sly-tongued snake sells such additional "lore" to those who pay him extra. I've rather less need for thy coins, so know this: The man was a warrior and sometime caravan-guard by the name of Thalaraz Dlaerve, once of Sheirtalar and long based in Waterdeep. He was mind-reamed and then slain by Elaith Craulnobur, who for some years has been gathering all the lore he can find about the House because of a growing hunger for its treasures. He hopes that its enchanted swords contain moonblades, possibly unfinished ones that he can "awaken." Who knows? He might be right.

horse-archers would harry such hordes and then retreat to the House, their entry covered by axe-wielding dwarves. The orcs would pursue, crashing against the walls of the fortress as dwarves led the elves along subterranean ways (known as "the Long Run"—which might still exist—in Laughing Hollow) that came to the surface in Ardeepforest. Humans and dwarves would defend the walls of the House, retreating to let the orcs storm inside. The orcs would rage ahead through trap after trap until they either all perished or turned and fled—whereupon the defenders on the walls would be waiting for them, ready to pour down buckets of carefully-cultured green slime, rain down arrows, and roll down heaps of crushing logs. Portculli could be dropped across the mouths of many courtyards to make them into gigantic holding pens, so defenders could slaughter the trapped orcs at their leisure. If the orcs were foolish enough, the fortress of Stoneturn could kill off the bulk of a hitherto unstoppable orc horde.

9. I had nothing to do with it. His name was Elgoeror Indethym, and he was a handsome, purring snake who was almost as clever as he thought he was. A noblewoman of Waterdeep stabbed him with a hairpin, but I never bothered to find out which of the scores of them that he had seduced and swindled did the deed; he richly earned his own demise. Hmm . . . much of what he stole from those nobles was never found.

10. I could expand this list for pages upon pages, but who reads these days? Let me instead name one survivor: Nymara Scheiron of Waterdeep, also known as "Kitten." Ask her nicely, and she might tell of her forays; ask her less nicely, however, and beware!

The House Today

Today, all of that death and glory is forgotten to most. Aside from what might be recovered from the crumbling bones of fallen warriors, no easily found treasure waits in the House of Stone; only endless death waits within. Adventurers manage to find this last commodity with impressive frequency.

To the ambitious, the House does offer access to the Underdark, and there are tales of a flickering magical portal or gate in its depths that links with a similar portal somewhere beneath Raurin or thereabouts, in lightless, monster-haunted caverns where a dwarven kingdom once flourished. A man who came to Waterdeep in 1344 DR with fistfuls of rubies to sell revealed that he had come from that lost and forgotten kingdom through the gate, but he was drunk at the time and has since vanished.[8]

Both interior and exterior walls of the House were once clad in slabs of stone sculpted into gigantic battle scenes depicting such images as rearing warhorses and dwarven knights smiting a variety of monsters. For a time it was fashionable among Waterdhavian nobles to own specimens of these large carved panels and display them near the entrances of villas for all to see, since it meant that one had wealth enough to hire a good adventuring band to fetch one. But as the panels became harder to get, some enterprising Watchful Order magist developed a spell that carves stone into an exact copy of existing stone surfaces touched by the caster. One authentic panel soon became a dozen. When word got around the fad died, even after the wizard perished mysteriously, taking his spell with him.[9]

The traps that adorn the House of Stone consist of stone teeter-totter blocks dumping those who step on them into deep, spike-studded pits, treadles that cause stone arms to spring forth from walls with swift crushing force, huge double doors not attached to their hinges so that they fall down on whoever pulls at their handles, rams that burst across rooms when the doors that conceal them are opened, and so on. Most traps are of the brute-force smashing variety, built of weighted and balanced stone that will last for centuries more if not deliberately destroyed.

Many vultures and carrion-crows perch on or near the House, waiting for fresh victims to happen along. Save in the harshest heart of winter, they seldom have to wait more than a tenday for a fresh band of adventurers to arrive.

Some sages estimate that the House has claimed more than three thousand bands of adventurers (not single folk) over the last decade, including the all-elven Laughing Lasses of Neverwinter, the Blue Fangs Stalwarts from Baldur's Gate, and the veteran bounty hunters from Scornubel known as the Bloodthunder Brand.[10]

So much have I, Volo, learned about the House of Stone—more than any other man who walks Faerûn today knows.

Ed Greenwood has two boats, two cottages, a lovely house in the country with a lovely cabin in its backyard—and no time to enjoy any of them.

The secret of The House of Stone is simple: It's one big trap.

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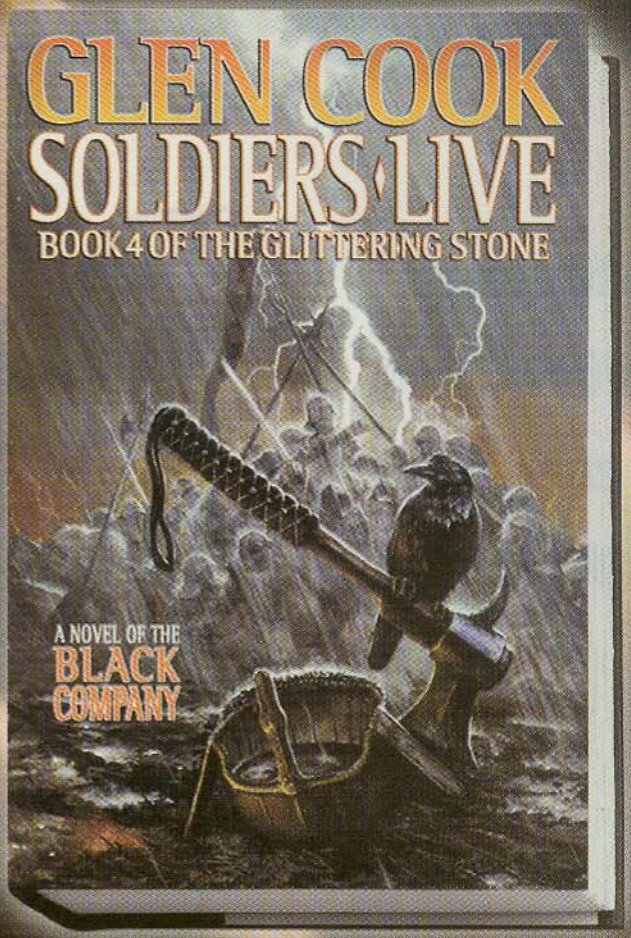

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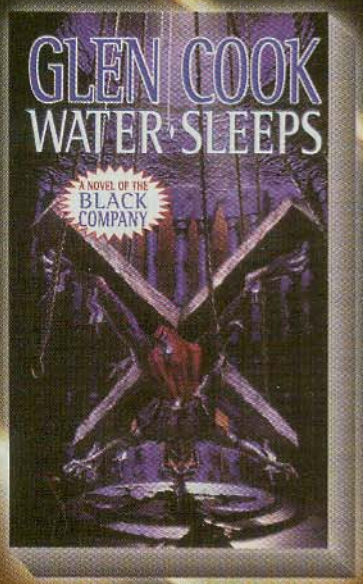

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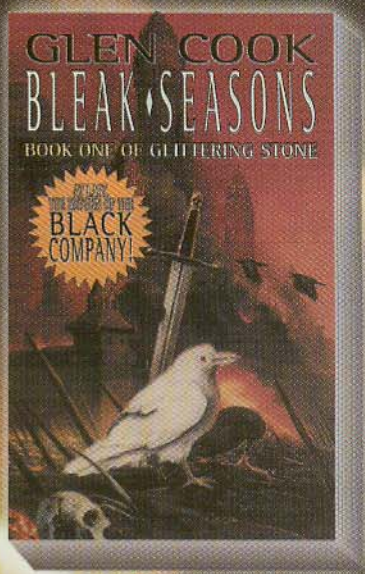

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The Green Dweomer

Spells that make your druids or nature-loving priests lean, green, fighting machines.

by Claudio Pozas

illustrated by Scott Fischer

DRUIDS ARE THE ULTIMATE DEFENDERS OF NATURE, and many of their signature spells come from the Plant sphere of priestly magic. The following new spells give those who employ "the green dweomer" a few surprises for their foes, both in combat and in roleplaying situations. Remember that in addition to the material components described here, all priest spells require the use of a holy symbol (or mistletoe).

Hail of Thorns

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 1
Range: 40 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 4
Area of Effect: 20-foot radius
Saving Throw: ½

This spell causes nearby thorny plants to launch a burst of 1d6 thorns plus 1 thorn per caster level. Each of these thorns causes 1 point of damage. For every three caster levels, one additional creature can be affected by the spell. Thus, a 6th-level druid can affect three orcs in a 20-foot radius, each suffering 1d6+6 points of damage. Victims who make a successful saving throw vs. spell suffer only half damage.

This spell is useless against targets wearing armor heavier than chainmail or who have a natural AC of 4 or better. Also, the spell fails if cast in an area devoid of plant life.

The verbal component is a low, shuffling sound, followed by a closing and opening of the caster's hand.

Pinespear

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 1
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 2 rounds + 1 round/level
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: 1 normal spear or staff
Saving Throw: None

Similar to the *shillelagh* spell, *pinespear* turns a normal weapon into a magical one. Once this spell is cast, the priest's staff grows a pinecone-shaped blade at its tip, essentially making the staff a spear. If cast upon a spear, the cone grows around the metal tip, causing no damage to the weapon. The *pinespear* grants a +1 bonus to attack rolls and inflicts 1d6+1 points of damage against Small or Medium-sized targets, 1d8+1 points to larger foes. (This damage is inflicted in place of the target weapon's normal damage.) Its wielder ignores medium-range penalties when throwing the weapon.

A *pinespear* inflicts double damage to plantlike creatures, including shambling mounds, needlemen, and treants. Note

that a *pinespear* is considered a stake when attacking vampires.

The material component is a piece of pine tree wood and a spear or staff, both of which must be inscribed with magical runes. The pine tree wood is consumed in the casting.

Nature's Mantilla

(Illusion/Phantasm)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 2
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn + 1 round/level
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: The caster
Saving Throw: Special

While under the effect of this spell, the caster is rendered virtually undetectable to all natural senses. The caster's voice is mistaken for the wind through the trees, the caster's scent for that of flowers. The caster's appearance goes completely unnoticed. If the caster remains motionless or moves up to half normal movement rate, there is no saving throw. If the caster moves at more than half normal movement rate, nearby creatures can make a successful saving throw vs. spell to detect the caster. If the area is heavily wooded, a –2 penalty is imposed to the saving throw. If the spell is cast in an area lacking dense growth, such as an open field, the saving throw is made at a +2 bonus.

If the caster makes a direct attack, the spell is instantly negated, although the priest gains surprise for that first attack. Casting spells upon oneself or casting subtle spells (such as *trip* or *entangle*) does not disrupt the *mantilla*.

The material component is a handful of leaves thrown over the caster's head while she mimicks the sound of wind. The leaves are consumed in the casting.

Leaf Ears

(Divination)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 2
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 2 rounds
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: None

By casting this spell upon a plant with leaves, the caster can hear anything that happens within 50 feet of another plant of the same type, which must be within 50 yards of the target plant per caster level. The caster must be aware of the location of the other end of the *leaf ear* and cannot simply listen "to hear what is out there." Therefore, it must be in an area he has been before. In all other regards, it is as if the priest were present. Note that the priest can't be affected by sound-based attacks through the *leaf ear*.

The material components of this spell are two plants of the same type within 50 yards, neither of which is consumed in the casting.

Rooting

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 3
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 1 turn
Area of Effect: The caster
Saving Throw: None

When cast, this spell transforms the caster's bare feet into roots that burrow deep into the ground. By absorbing nutrients from the soil, the caster can go without regular food or drink for one day for every two levels of the caster. Therefore, a 6th-level priest could go without eating for three days. It takes 1 hour to absorb a day's worth of nourishment, so that same priest must stay rooted for 3 hours for the spell to work.

This spell goes unnoticed in areas with rich soil (such as forests or swamps), but it severely depletes barren areas (such as scrub plains or savannahs). Therefore, druids use the spell sparingly.

Thorn Growth

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 3
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 5 rounds + 1 round/two levels
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: The caster
Saving Throw: None

Thorn growth is a more powerful version of the *barkskin* spell. When this spell is cast, the priest's skin assumes the coloration and texture of wood and grows 1-inch-long thorns. For the duration of the spell, the priest has AC 3, inflicts an extra 1d3 points of damage with each unarmed attack (including grapples), and gains a bonus to her saving throws of +1 for every three levels of experience. This bonus does not apply to fire-based attacks.

While affected by this spell, the caster can be the source of a *hail of thorns* spell, which functions normally, although this ends the *thorn growth* spell immediately.

The material component is a blessed thorn, which is consumed in the casting.

Bear Fruit

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 4
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Permanent
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: None

When casting this spell, the priest must drive a staff or club into the ground and slowly chant magical words. While the priest does so, the staff grows into a full tree within moments, its branches heavy with fruit. The tree is of any kind desired by the priest (with the DM's discretion). Enough fruit is produced to feed one person for every level of the caster. The tree created is nonmagical by nature and remains alive as long as the surrounding conditions allow. Such a tree won't live more than a few hours in the middle of a sandy desert, while one created in a forest might live its full natural lifespan.

This spell is often used to recreate forests destroyed by fire, magic, or other adverse conditions.

The material component is the staff or club, which is consumed in the casting.

Placate Plants

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 4
Range: 10 yards/level
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 7
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: Special

This spell serves two functions: If it is cast in an area with only normal plants, it increases the amount of nutrients found in the soil, allowing the plants to grow faster, bear more fruit, and prosper in otherwise adverse conditions. If the soil is depleted (after several crops, for instance), this spell feeds the plants while the soil recovers its natural nutrients. In this manner, the area of effect is a 40-foot square per level, the duration is one month, and there is no saving throw.

The spell's other function works on dangerous plants and plantlike creatures. It placates their hunger so they won't attack. Shambling mounds, choke creepers, mantraps, thornies, and the like remain peaceful for 4 rounds plus 1 round per level of the caster. In this manner, the spell affects 2 HD per level of the caster, so a 9th-level druid can placate two 8-HD shamblers for 13 rounds. The plants are entitled to a saving throw vs. spell to resist.

Druids generally use this spell in conjunction with *speak with plants* to establish peaceful relationships with the plant communities near their homes.

Bronzewood Weapon

(Alteration, Enchantment/Charm)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 5
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: 1 weapon
Saving Throw: None

This powerful spell creates temporary magical weapons. It functions only with weapons the caster can use. (That is, a druid can enchant only spears, staves, scimitars, daggers, and other allowable weapons.)

When casting *bronzewood weapon*, the caster holds the weapon in her hand and lowers it to the ground. While the priest chants, the weapon phases into the earth. As the chants ends, the priest pulls the weapon from the ground. The player then rolls a d100. On a roll of 1–10, the weapon is ruined, rusted beyond use. On a roll of 11–00, the weapon is transformed into gleaming bronzewood. The hilt (or handle or body) of the weapon is surrounded by vines, some extruding thorns and leaves. The weapon now has a +3 bonus to hit and a +3 damage bonus, and it inflicts double damage to evil woodland creatures. At the end of the duration, the outer covering shatters, revealing the normal weapon underneath.

This spell is sometimes used to create magical weapons for warriors, druids, and rangers who have defended the woodlands against destruction. Rumors of a *bronzewood armor* spell have not been confirmed.

Rooted Wrath

(Alteration)
Sphere: Plant
Level: 5
Range: 10 yards/level
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: 5-foot radius/level
Saving Throw: None

A more powerful version of *entangle*, this spell imbues the surrounding vegetation with mobility. For every caster level, one 10-foot-long wooden limb grapples and attacks the caster's foes. Vines, roots, branches, and the like can be affected. Each limb is AC 5, has 10 hit points, THAC0 17, and at the caster's discretion either causes 1d6 points of damage or grapples the victim, rendering him motionless unless he makes a Bend Bars/Lift Gates check to break free. The limbs suffer only half damage from bludgeoning weapons. Each limb can attack one creature, so up to one creature per caster level can be attacked. Multiple limbs can attack a single victim, requiring multiple Bend Bars/Lift Gates checks from the victim. After the spell fades, the surviving limbs return to their former positions, releasing all foes.

The material component is a drop of the caster's blood and a small, *blessed* wood carving. Both components are consumed by the spell.

Claudio Pozas lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where he swears there are no man-eating plants.

MIND BLAST

All the potions in the 2nd Edition *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* are called "Potion of (something)." Of all the words that go in place of the "(something)" in that phrase, the shortest one in number of letters is not the shortest one in number of syllables. What is it?

You can find the solution to this *MIND BLAST* on page 14.

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For Glory, Love, and All the Right Reasons

"Faint heart never won fair maiden" ... or was that the other way around?

by Alexander Wilson & Justin Paulette

illustrated by Shawn Sharp

A HEART MIGHT BE TRUE, INTENTIONS PURE AND NOBLE, but wars aren't won by virtue alone. Heroes must face unfavorable odds, which might explain their scarcity. There are, however, certain measures that counter those odds. In the proper hands, these measures can offer magical remedies for the heroes whose aim is not as true as their hearts.

Favors for the Favored

When a damsel (or a gentleman, for that matter) presents her knight with a token of affection, the lovers' passion might empower the item to protect the recipient in times of peril. In recent times, however, anxious lovers have sought more reliable blessings, approaching artisan wizards with requests and coins for enchanted tokens.

Favors might be found in such varied forms as a love letter or poem, a pressed flower, a piece of cloth or kerchief, a lock of hair, a brooch or pin, a shared holy symbol, a feather or bit of fur, a locket with a small sketch or painting of the beloved, a vial of tears, a toy or music box, a ring, a charm, or an anklet or bracelet—though any trinket of significant sentimental value is appropriate. Note that a character can only carry one active *favor* from one person at a time. That is, a knight might carry a *favor* from his lady love, as well as one from his mother, but not two working *favors* from one of them.

All *favors* instill confidence (+2 bonus to Morale checks) in the recipient. The powers of *favors* are thought to be permanent (with the exception of the *safehome* power; see below), provided the adventurer has not lost heart or faith in the giver. *Favors* retain their powers even if stolen, provided the original receiver remains in love with the giver. (Death does not necessarily imply a loss of heart; the enchantment of a *favor* might well outlive its intended owner.) Lacking sentimental value, however, a *favor* does not improve any new possessor's morale.

A sample of the enchantments placed upon *favors* includes:

Courage: The carrier of this talisman receives a +3 bonus to all Fear checks from nonmagical sources and a +1 bonus to all Fear checks from magical sources. In the RAVENLOFT® setting, this *favor* provides a +3 bonus to Fear checks, a +2 bonus to Horror checks, and a +1 bonus to Madness checks.

Cunning: Muscle-bound warriors might have the strength of oxen, but they have a greater chance of surviving their quests if they had only half the wit of an ox. This *favor* provides a +1 bonus to Wisdom checks.

Discernment: Even the greatest hero's abilities are hampered when she cannot trust those around her. This *favor*

provides the wearer with the ability to *detect lies* (as the spell) once per day.

Fidelity: A maiden hopes her soldier will be true. With this token in hand, he'll have no choice. The carrier receives an uneasy, guilty feeling if he considers any action that might jeopardize his noble quest or diminish his loving devotion—including, of course, any thoughts of infidelity.

Fortitude: All wounds dealt to the possessor inflict 1 less point of damage, as major organs are conveniently spared the brunt of the assault. If using the Critical Hits rules in *Player's Option®: Combat & Tactics*, subtract one from the "Severity" chart on pages 107–115.

Fortuity: Skill at arms and magical might are often necessary for survival, but some realistic lovers accept that other factors will bring their adventurers home. The carrier of a *favor* with this power receives a +1 bonus to all saving throws.

Luck: Some lovers know that the survival of their beloved adventurers rests not on their skills but on the unpredictability of the gods. The carrier can reroll one failed saving throw per week.

Perseverance: Often a lover dispenses with such outrageous hopes as having the champion return unscathed and merely wishes for her safe return. This *favor* sustains a character who has reached death's door (between –1 and –9 hit points). The character loses no further hit points from bleeding once unconscious. If the death's door rules are not used, a character brought to exactly 0 hit points is not dead but only unconscious.

Remembrance: Occasionally, a maiden worries that her love will forget her on the journey ahead. The carrier of this *favor* thinks about the giver constantly, always in a positive light, and can rarely make a decision without considering her in the process. The carrier—focused on the quest's goal so as to return to his loves all the sooner—gains a +1 bonus to Wisdom and Intelligence checks, but—due to careful approach of dangerous situations—suffers a +2 penalty to initiative on the first round of any combat.

Safehome: This mixed blessing is a highly popular gift among worrisome lovers. When in harm's way, the carrier, with a single command, can be *teleported* back to his beloved's arms instantly. Unlike other *favors*, this power works only once before the item's enchantment expires, although the item still improves morale. As a safeguard, this *favor* can decide whether its carrier is "in harm's way," under the following conditions: a single attacking creature has over twice the Hit Dice as the carrier, the carrier's hit points fall below 10% of full, or the carrier fails a Fear check. In any of these situations, the *favor* has a 5% chance of *teleporting* the carrier back to the giver of the gift, leaving any comrades behind.

FAVOR OF REMEMBRANCE

There are a few other drawbacks, as well. There is no known limit in direction or distance for the *teleport;* if the giver is dead and buried before the *favor's* enchantment expires, it is possible that the beloved adventurer could be *teleported* into the ground with her. As with all *favors*, this power is transferable, and an unknowing hobgoblin might unwittingly be *teleported* into the arms of the lady whose betrothed he has recently slain. The horrors to which a vampire or unholy priest, with power over the dead, could put this item to use need not—and should not—be mentioned.

Security: The uninventive damsel might not know what power to seek for her *favor* but only asks that her adventurer "not get hit too much." This *favor* improves the carrier's Armor Class by 1.

Vitality: With the possession of this *favor*, a hapless adventurer acts as though he has the Fast Healer trait, as described on page 106 in *Player's Option: Skills & Powers*. In short, the carrier can recover 1 hit point of damage within 2d6 turns of receiving a wound. Also, the character naturally heals at a rate of 2 hit points, not 1, per day.

XP Value (all favors): 300

GP Value (all favors): 750

Blades of Lofty Intentions

Although the arms described herein can be of any form, a dashing paramour challenging a sinister opponent would paint a somewhat less inspiring image were he to draw a "mightily enchanted pointed stick." It should be of no surprise that these favor the form of the rapier, as few weapons are so able to melt the heart of a romantic.

BREATH OF ABSOLUTE VALOR

Blade of Heroic Measures

This *sword +1* has also been dubbed the "Blade of Desperate Feats," for such seems to be its true purpose. Drawing upon the wielder's own courage—or, more commonly, fear—this weapon promotes deeds that defy all odds to create victory from hopeless situations. In moments of peril (as deemed appropriately dramatic by the DM) the *blade* affords the wielder a called shot at a –2 penalty to the attack, rather than the usual –4 penalty.

Additionally, this weapon allows disarm maneuvers at no penalty. Although disarmament usually insinuates a maneuver against a rival's weapons, it can target any item that is not grafted to the opponent's skin, such as a wine goblet or belt buckle. Expert disarms, in which the wielder determines where the disarmed item lands, are attempted as regular called shots. Thus, expert disarms are attempted at –4 penalty to attack and a +1 penalty to initiative rather than the usual –8 penalty to attack and +2 penalty to initiative. See *The Complete Fighter's Handbook* for further explanation of disarming rules. The +1 enchantment of the *sword* does not benefit any called shot or disarm attempt.

XP Value: 900 **GP Value:** 1,300

The Impeccable Defender

A skilled swordswoman seeking to teach her opponent a lesson in humility might find him a most insubordinate student when his companions are present to disrupt her instruction. This blade might grant her the edge to educate her opponents en masse. This *sword +1* gives the wielder one free parry for every two opponents she faces.

In order to reap the benefits of this *sword*, opponents must be attacking her directly in melee combat. Parry attempts do not gain the +1 bonus of the *sword*. The wielder can still make her usual attacks, but for every parry attempted, she suffers a –2 penalty to attack for that round. (That is, the use of two free parries, necessitating four attackers, would cause the wielder to strike at a –4 penalty.) Should the wielder choose to parry only with normal attacks—neglecting to use the free parries or while fighting only one opponent—she parries with a +4 bonus to her attack.

If the optional rules for parrying are used, the character who forfeits all other actions for the round can subtract an additional two from her Armor Class for her first opponent, and a –1 for every attacker after the first (affording a –2 for the first attacker, –3 for the second, –4 for the third, and so on). She can also, if not engaged in melee combat, parry one missile attack per round as if it were a melee attack, with no bonuses to the roll.

XP Value: 1,200 **GP Value:** 2,100

Rapier of Brilliance

For the mysterious vigilante bent on concealing his identity or making a grand exit, this blade supplies the dazzle to make both possible. In battle, it acts as a *rapier* +2, but once per turn the wielder can create a concentrated ray of light to nearly blind one opponent. (If in combat, this effect can be used in addition to his attacks for the round.) Any attempt by the distracted opponent to identify the wielder for 2 rounds automatically fails. The affected opponent must also make a successful saving throw vs. spell or suffer a –2 penalty to attack rolls for those 2 rounds. In addition to this effect, the *rapier* can, once per day, produce a glaring radiance that obscures all vision (except the wielder's) in a 20-foot radius. This effect lasts for 1d4+1 rounds, and opponents receive no saving throw.

XP Value: 950 **GP Value:** 1,400

Multifarious Items for the Complacency Impaired

Of course, a romantic hero need not be a swordsman, and a loved one waiting patiently at home is not a prerequisite for romanticism. The following items are for any who wish to look, feel, or act the part of a hero.

Breath of Absolute Valor

Only the bravest, most altruistic heroes ever put this oily potion to the test. To save the life of a fallen companion, consumers can drink this liquid and breathe life into the victim's body via the mouth—thus giving the picture of a kiss, as has been the misinterpretation of this potion's use. The victim can be of any gender or race (including elf), can be unconscious, bleeding to death, or recently dead (for no more than 1 hour), and the victim can have died by any means, provided the body is intact. Upon receiving the breath, the recipient awakens immediately, with hit points 80% restored and a –1 penalty to Constitution for 24 hours.

The consumer, however, must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic or die within 1d4 rounds, as the consumer's soul will have lost its vitality forever, negating any possibility of being *raised* or *resurrected*—though this does not mean that the deceased cannot find a proper place in the afterlife, should that be a concern. If the consumer makes the saving throw, his hit points drop to 1 and the consumer falls into a magical slumber for 3d8 hours. Upon awakening, he will have lost 1 point of Constitution per level of the person saved, thereafter regaining 1 point every 24 hours until

the Constitution is fully restored. If the level of the victim is equal to or higher than the consumer's Constitution score, the imbiber remains comatose for additional days equal to the difference between the Constitution score and the saved character's level. After this time, the savior's Constitution returns as described above.

XP Value: 1,500 **GP Value:** 3,300

Bridle of the Companion Mount

What is a knight without his warhorse or a rogue without the means of a quick escape? This item instills courage (+3 bonus to Morale checks) in a mount and creates an empathic link with its rider, providing a +1 bonus to the mount's attacks. In addition, tricks can be attempted at a +4 bonus to proficiency rolls (such as scooping up an item or maiden at a gallop or jumping a fence to escape her entourage).

XP Value: 700 **GP Value:** 1,350

Candle of Renewed Resilience

When adventurers light this *candle* and stare into its flame, inhaling its fragrant blend of herbs and falling into a meditative slumber (for 1d4 hours—often performed during a full night's rest), they find their dreams focused upon their quest or whatever problems plague them at the time. While they breathe the incense of the completely burnt *candle,* they gain new insight and perspective, allowing them to awaken with renewed spirits and strong suspicions leading them toward the solution of a puzzle that previously eluded them. Often, this involves a leap of reason that simply seems right to the characters—inexplicable "gut feelings."

XP Value: 500 **GP Value:** 900

Everflowing Cape

This full, billowing *cape* reaches to the wearer's ankles and flows about as if continuously stirred by some unfelt breeze. Jumping from a height of 20 feet or less or across a chasm 10 feet wide or less, the wearer is certain to land surefooted and safe as the *cape* spreads wide to collect the air within it. This also allows the wearer to make precise landings when falling, such as when jumping from a second story window onto a horse's back. However, this presumes that the horse, which is not affected by the *cape's* magic, does not bolt suddenly upon the hero's descent.

As a further effect of the *cape's* nature, sleight of hand attempts, such as producing a rose from nowhere or slipping a set of keys from the warden's belt, are possible at a 75% chance of success.

XP Value: 800 **GP Value:** 1,400

Gloves of the Gallant

An adventurer wearing these black leather *gloves* is unaffected by any nonmagical distraction while engaged in melee combat. When the wearer desires to display lack of concern for an opponent's skill, the *gloves* do the fighting for the wearer with no loss to attack rolls, damage, or number of attacks per round. Meanwhile, the wearer can engage in trite conversation, admire her surroundings, and even rest her weary eyes. The wearer can regain control of her weapons at any time with minimal effort. However, after 2 rounds of fighting without the total control of the wearer, the *gloves* decide that their wearer is no longer sufficiently interested in the fray and cease fighting. After the next full round spent with the wearer in control, the *gloves* can take control again. The *gloves* also stop fighting if the wearer begins casting a spell or is magically frightened, *held,* or *charmed*. The *gloves* do not fight for the wearer until the second round of engaged combat. To have any effect, the *glove* of the fighting hand must be worn, or, if using a two-handed weapon, *gloves* must be worn on both hands. Fully 75% of all *gloves of the gallant* are right-handed, but many are found in pairs.

XP Value: 650 **GP Value:** 1,500

Lord Albrect turned toward the door as a shiver ran up his spine. The apparition waited dark and still with malace burning in his eyes. There would be no negotiation this time, and no help would
KALDEEN'S CHRONICLERS

Kaldeen's Chroniclers of Questing Confessions

Originally created by the High Priest Kaldeen, the purpose of these light, sturdy leather-bound books was to maintain accurate journals of crusades. The faithful were presented with tomes such as these as they began their righteous quests, and these books collectively served as a record of those glorious—or, infrequently, shameful—champions of the church.

Upon receiving such a tome from a high priest, the holy warrior writes his name and the purpose of the quest upon the first page. All of the deeds performed after this time appear in the book. The entries are written with tremendous

SHIELD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

detail, including even the thoughts and emotions of the possessor. It is thus a truthful representation of the knight's sojourn, scribing in harsh honesty all noble and reproachful behavior. The tome possesses mastery of composition, recording heroic events in awe-inspiring detail, and acts of cowardice in equally-revealing exposition. The tome decides for itself when a journey has come to its completion, and its frequent perusal might well aid the knight in dilemmas.

Although originally created by a religious order, similar tomes are used by thieving guildmasters to assure their hired professionals don't hold back on their findings after a profitable burglary, and by wanderers simply wanting to leave behind a memoir of their adventures. Such a text can assure some a page—or book—in history, but it is certainly not a possession craved by the unsure of heart.

XP Value: 800 **GP Value:** 1,550

Perfume of Wondrous Attraction

The wearer of a single spray of this *perfume*, usually found with 1d6 doses, gains +1 bonus to Charisma with regard to all humanoids of the same sex (with the exception of dwarves, who consider the scent hostile and might feel provoked to attack). The recipient of the *perfume* also has a Charisma score of 16—or a +1 bonus to Charisma if she already possesses a score of 16 or higher—to all humanoids of the opposite gender (again with the exception of dwarves). The *perfume's* magical scent automatically dissipates after 1 hour. However, the *perfume* is milk-based, so after 2 hours, the wearer might begin to stink like sour milk, resulting in a –2 penalty to natural Charisma until the *perfume* is washed off.

XP Value: 450 **GP Value:** 950

Potion of Spotlessness

No adventurer can avoid the dust and grime of the road, the sweat and blood of battle, and the rank odors of going without a bath for months at a time. The *potion of spotlessness* cleans the consumer of all exterior impurities, from bugs and oil on hair follicles to mud on the face. The *potion* also cleans and mends light wounds, healing 1d4 points of damage. The consumer will look, feel, and smell as if recently bathed thoroughly with soap and water, although the wearer will not actually become wet. The *potion of spotlessness* will not affect tattoos, equipment, or clothes (although dirt beneath the wearer's clothing is removed), and the consumer is not shaved or groomed. The cleaned-off dirt, grime, bugs, oils, and so on appear at the foot of the consumer in a small pile or pool.

XP Value: 125 **GP Value:** 200

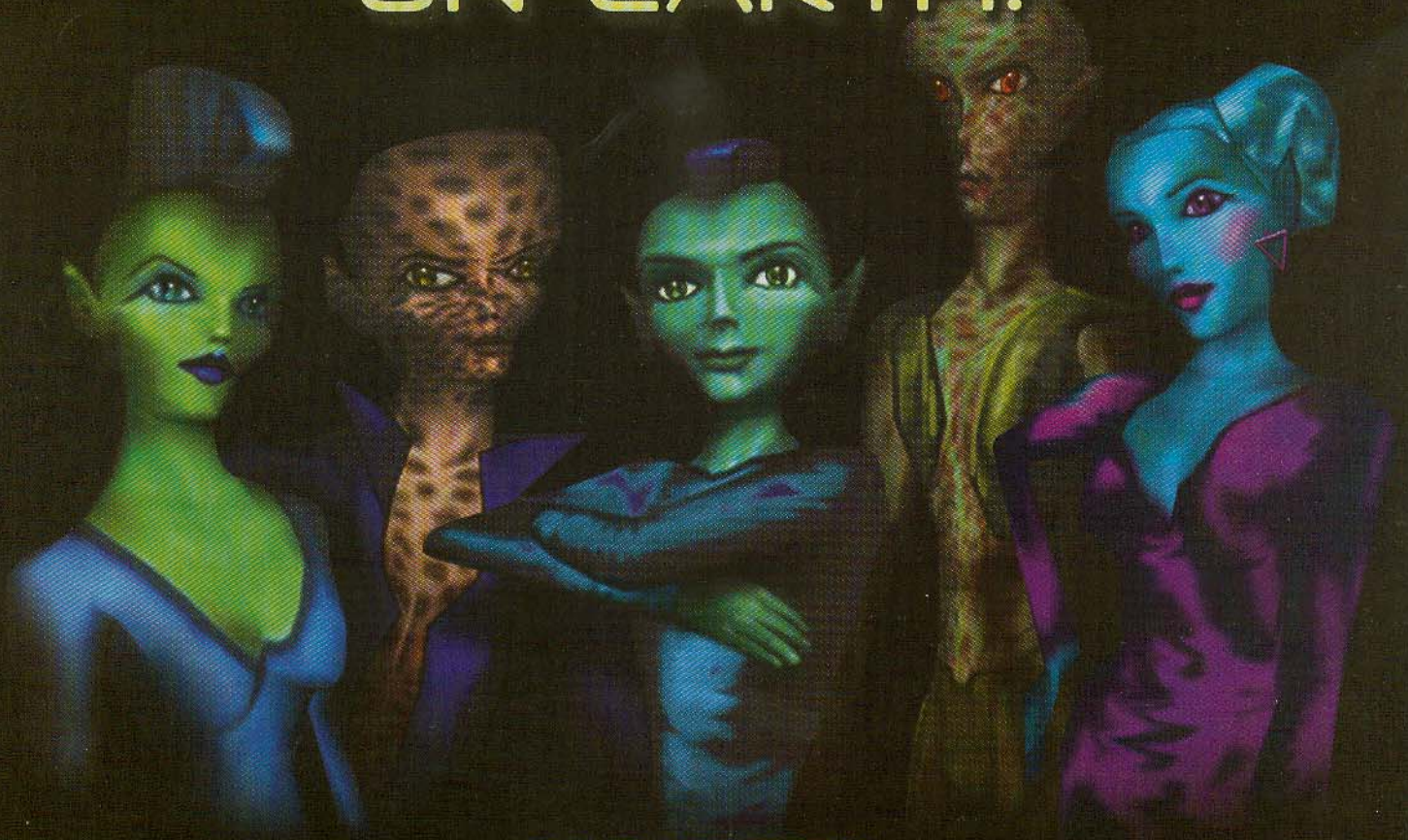
Shield of the Righteous

The bane of many a knightly warrior is the undead. This sacred *shield* instantly makes its bearer aware of undead within 60 feet and acts as a *shield +3* against such abominations. (It acts as a *shield +1* versus other foes.) This *shield* also affects any saving throws the possessor must make against the special attacks of the undead. It allows the effects of such attacks, even those that do not allow for saving throws, to be postponed for 1d4 rounds or until combat ceases, allowing the warrior to fight on even when imminent death is certain. While the *shield* spares the wielder from these immediate effects, it also provides a detailed and accurate foresight of the horrors that await, including the precise amount of time left for the wielder to make peace with his god.

XP Value: 1,200 **GP Value:** 2,500

Alexander and Justin assure us that they proffer the favors in this article for all the right reasons and none of the nefarious.

FEELING ALIENATED ON EARTH?



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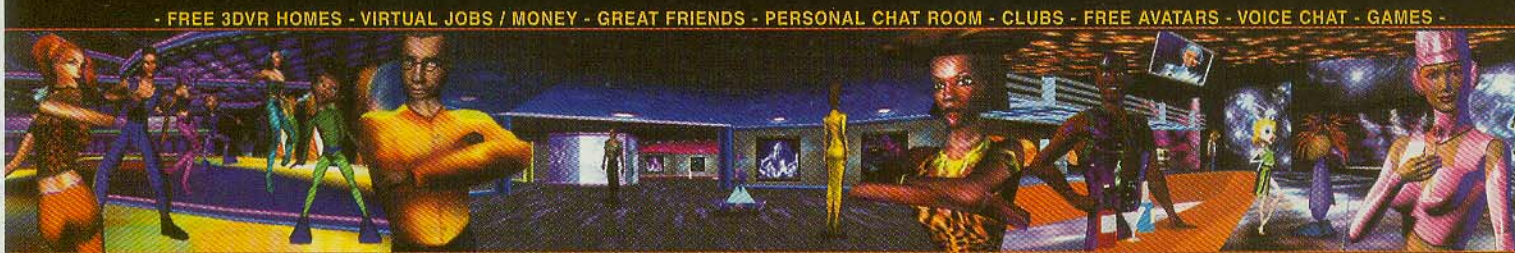

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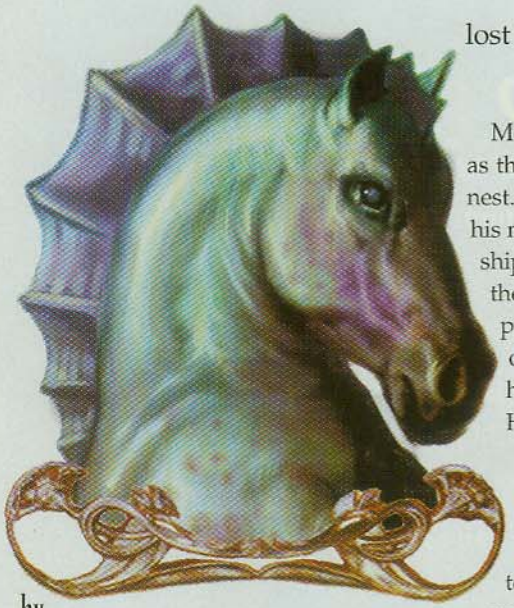


by
Margaret S. Lundock
& Ramsey Lundock

illustrated by
Scott & Teresa Fischer

"Don't dance with the mop, you lame dog!"

The knotted end of the colt lashed across Melchoir's back as he bent harder into his work. He wondered again what had happened to his treasure map, the precious map that was to have changed his life. It didn't matter now. Instead of finding safe passage on a reputable ship, he had fallen prey to Captain Baccar and his hard ruffians, kidnapped to serve for the voyage, ultimately to be sold into slavery in the Delta Towns. His map, his freedom, and his future were lost forever.

Melchoir didn't look up from his work as the whistle sounded from the crow's nest. He didn't stop the steady stroke of his mop as the sails were furled and the ship hove to. He didn't think beyond the swish-plop of his mop as the crew pulled out the nets and threw them out into the dark green sea. Already he was sinking into slave mentality. He did what he was told, and he kept doing it until ordered otherwise.

"You! Leave off there. Spread this overboard."

Melchoir dropped his mop and took the basket of mixed greens and corn.[1] His stomach growled as he threw the succulent vegetables onto the rolling swells of the bottomless ocean. At last the basket was empty. Melchoir turned it over and sat down. They'd find something for him to do soon enough, but no one yelled at him to return to work, and no colt lashed his back.

The ship fell quiet as the crew peered overboard. For over half an hour there was no activity aboard as the ship rocked quietly on the vast ocean. Gradually, Melchoir lapsed into sleep.

A collective gasp from the crew awoke him. Hushed footsteps hurried across the deck. With an ear-splitting screech, the ropes of the nets were hauled up through the pulleys as the entire crew heaved with all their might.

"Grab a rope, boy, and pull!" an old salt yelled as Melchoir bolted to his feet.

Melchoir grabbed a rope and heaved.

A cheer rose from the crew, and Melchoir saw their catch. Two powerful tails whipped and thrashed against the net.

1. Hippocampi are herbivores. Their natural diet consists of various types of seaweed and kelp. Obtaining salt in their diet is not a problem, as they can draw on the sea water. Other minerals are ingested by chewing on coral reefs and underwater limestone formations. Fresh water hippocampi eat water hyacinths, reeds, and water grasses. Hippocampi have epicurean tastes and are always tempted by new and different foods. They enjoy corn, alfalfa, lush greens, apples, carrots, and most grains.

They were not the rubbery smooth tails of dolphins or sharks, but scaled tails like those of a bony fish, with delicate, almost transparent tail fins.[2] The dorsal fin was the same way: rainbowed like a silken veil in the sunlight. Round about the dorsal fin, the scales gave way to fine hair, strong shoulders, and a long neck crested with another lacy fin, held erect by thin spines. The neck tapered to the finely chiseled head of a horse. There before Melchoir, thrashing in the net, was a hippocampus mare and her foal.[3] They shimmered in the afternoon sun, the mare pale as foam, the foal dark green.[4]

"Haul 'em over the deck—hurry before she breaks loose! Assemble the tank!" Baccar ordered. The old Captain's gravelly voice matched his grizzled chin and weather-worn face. "Do you see any scouts or other mares?"[5] he yelled up at the crow's nest.

"All clear!" came the answer.

"Keep your eyes peeled. If you see any, we'll set sail before they mass. If you see any sign of tritons, sound the alarm!"[6]

The crew swung the net over the rail and dropped it unceremoniously onto the deck. Already the mare had chewed a large hole in the netting. As the net fell away, the hippocampi struggled, their tails whipping frantically. But it was no good; the delicate fins at the ends of their front legs were much too fragile to support them on dry land.[7] At last, exhausted and defeated, the mare stopped her battle. Her sides heaved with the unfamiliar task of breathing air.[8] Sweat mixed with sea water dripped from her hair and scales. She curled her long tail about her foal and glared with sullen rage at her captors.

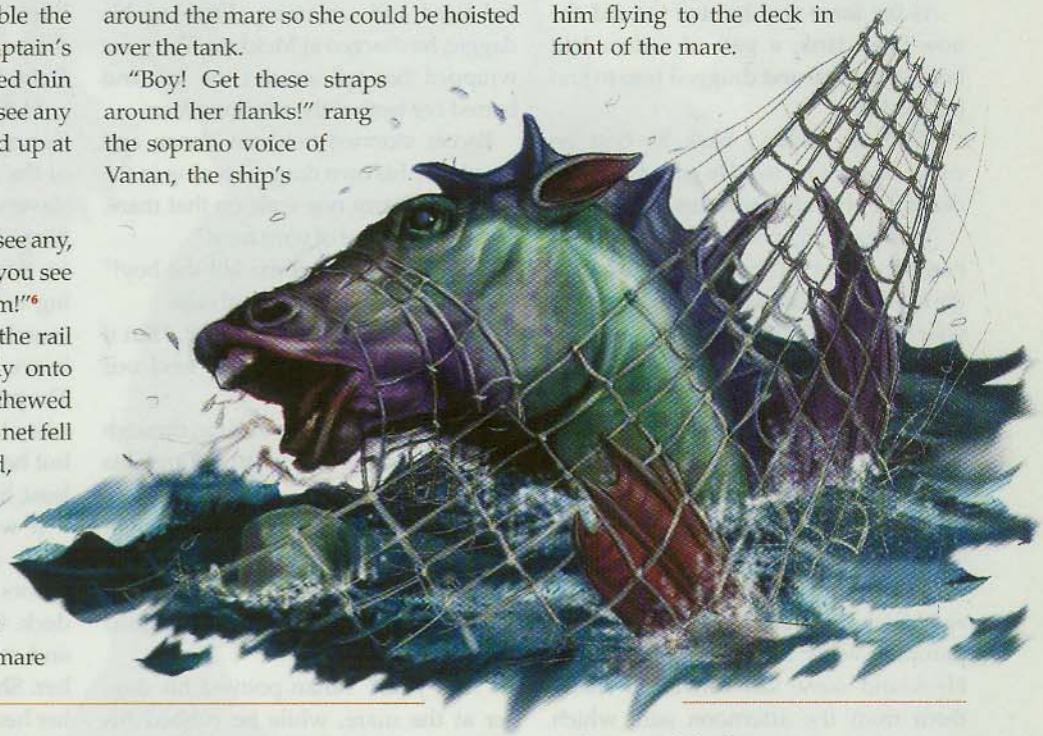
"Get the winch rigged. How's the tank coming?" Baccar barked.

"We're almost ready to start pumping," one of the crew yelled as he fought to jam the top plank into the iron corner support. Beside him another sailor caulked the tight seams between the dovetailed planks.

The crew rigged a winch on a yardarm and manned the pumps, filling the tank. Now came the task of easing the rope around the mare so she could be hoisted over the tank.

"Boy! Get these straps around her flanks!" rang the soprano voice of Vanan, the ship's second-in-command. Few people made the mistake of making fun of the slender man's voice. No one survived to do it a second time.

Vanan threw the strapping at Melchoir to the chortles of the men. As the sailors sat back to enjoy the fun, Melchoir gathered them up. Talking softly and moving slowly, he eased toward the mare's chest. He had heard that hippocampi could bite and butt viciously.[9] The mare certainly wasn't going to ram him as she floundered on the deck, but her teeth were bared and her ears flattened. Melchoir tried to stay well back from the head as he eased toward the mare's side. Suddenly, a lightning-quick tail slap sent him flying to the deck in front of the mare.



2. Hippocampi are a hybrid species combining elements of mammals and fish. Their scales, tails, and fins are fishlike, not dolphinlike. Hippocampi regulate their body temperatures to a large degree but not entirely. They lay eggs but suckle their young. They can breathe air or water.

3. Hippocampi live in pods that usually contain one to three mature stallions, eight to twenty mares, and unweaned foals numbering about three-quarters the number of mares. The pod generally stays together, though there are exceptions, such as mares that stay in one place to protect eggs or hippocampi that are lured away from the pod by curiosity or tempting morsels of food.

The mares are in charge of caring for the young, and they lay one egg at a time. Twins are extremely rare, occurring about 1% of the time. If twins are hatched, either from two eggs or from a double-yolked egg, there is only a 10% chance of both surviving unless there is another nursing mare available to care for one of the foals. Hippocampi young are called foals in general, though males are called colts and females fillies.

A mare will lay her egg in a protected grotto and stay in the vicinity to guard the egg, much like a mother alligator. When the egg hatches after a five-month incubation period, the mare cares for the foal for twelve months, slightly longer than a horse.

4. The colors of the hippocampi are as varied as the hues of the ocean, ranging from the sea-foam white of waves to the azure blue of reefs to the midnight green of the open sea.

5. Hippocampi are intelligent and therefore have a social structure that is more complex than a herd of horses. The stallions in a pod come to an understanding through custom and ritual as to who is the leader. The other stallions perform ancillary tasks such as scouting for food or enemies. Each stallion has a harem, though lead stallions generally have the largest harem. Once a mare chooses to enter a harem, she will usually stay with that stallion for life. If she wishes to leave the harem, she must go through certain formalities and rituals.

6. Hippocampi are often domesticated by tritons, though domesticated is perhaps the wrong word. Their relationship is more one of mutual cooperation and alliance. Hippocampi allied with tritons usually lay their eggs in the lower chambers of the tritons' castle. The eggs are guarded by the tritons and their minions vigilantly.

7. Hippocampi are strictly water animals. The delicate fins on the ends of their front legs, unlike the leathery fins of seals and sea turtles, cannot support their weight. The fragile membranes of the fins are easily torn on dry land.

8. Breathing air is laborious for hippocampi because they are used to filtering water for their oxygen, but they can breathe air for extended periods. A hippocampus's biggest problems on land are dehydration and overheating. For every hour a hippocampus spends on land, add a +1 penalty to its Armor Class. After 5 hours out of the water, they are defenseless and can be hit automatically. Once they are back in enough water to cover them and allow them to regain buoyancy, their Armor Class returns to 5.

9. In the wild, a hippocampus's first instinct is to flee danger. They are extremely fast and can outswim all their natural enemies, which include sharks, killer whales, and squid. If they must fight, their main weapons are their teeth and their ramming attack. A hippocampi bite inflicts 1d4 points of damage, and they are strong enough to break bones or sever fingers.

Ramming attacks inflict 1d8 points of damage and are capable of stunning victims or breaking bones.

Hippocampi have two attacks per round, which can consist of bites, ramming attacks, or a combination of both. A victim of a successful head butt must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation at a +2 bonus or be stunned for 1d3 rounds.

Her head snaked out, teeth flashing. Melchoir scrambled away, but not before the mare's teeth sank into his calf, crushing the muscle before he kicked himself free.

Melchoir grabbed his leg in agony. Released from the drag of the water, the mare's tail whipped and lashed as she glared at him.[10]

The crew hooted, well pleased with their entertainment.

"Help him out, men!" Vanan sneered.

With gleeful brutality the crew jumped on the mare and wrestled the straps under her girth and flanks. Each time her tail sent a hapless victim flying across the deck, jeering laughter erupted from the crew.

As the mare was hoisted toward the now-filled tank, a pair of sailors laid hold of the foal and dragged him to join his mother.

Melchoir hobbled back as best he could on his sore leg. He gazed in wonder at the beautiful creatures.

"Quit gawkin', you lame dog," Baccar barked, cuffing Melchoir on the back of the head with a calloused hand. "They're your charge now, and you'd best take damned good care of 'em."

From that moment, Melchoir's every waking minute was devoted to the hippocampi. The tank was cramped and shallow, barely twelve feet square and five feet deep, and the two animals dirtied it quickly. In the heat of the day, the water grew uncomfortably hot for them, so Melchoir was almost constantly pumping water into or out of the tank. He found some sail canvas to shade them from the afternoon sun, which burned their skin and dried their scales. Instead of the delicacies used to lure them into the net, he was allowed to feed them only dried seaweed. While he tended them, the mare watched him—and she watched as the crew kicked and beat him.

For what seemed the hundredth time that day, Melchoir attached the pump to release the soiled water before pumping fresh, cool water in.

"Can't you keep that tank cleaner? It has the entire aft deck smelling like rotten kelp." Vanan shoved him against the tank.

"Maybe if you gave them a decent sized tank, I could." Melchoir spoke before thinking and immediately regretted it.

Vanan grabbed him and slammed him against the tank. His watery blue eyes blazed. "You sorry little maggot! You just made your last mistake, you ..."

There was a whistling splash as the mare's tail smacked against Vanan's face, sending him flying to the deck. He rose, red-faced and screaming. Drawing his dagger, he charged at Melchoir. The mare wrapped her tail around the lad and barred her teeth at the attacking man.

Baccar stormed between Vanan and his victim, his own dagger shining in the sun. "You harm one scale on that mare, and I'll take it out of your hide!"

"But the boy... Let me kill the boy!" Vanan sputtered in hysterical rage.

"Go ahead," Baccar shrugged. "But if you kill him, you'll have to tend our catch."

Vanan hesitated. Tremors ran through his body as he fought to control his anger.

A cruel smile curled his lips. "All right then, but when we make port, sell him to Quando."

"Suit yourself. Quando pays as good as any dealer."

"And you!" Vanan pointed his dagger at the mare, while he rubbed his red, swollen cheek. "I'll see you go to some rich idiot who'll dye you purple and put you in a bubble bath to amuse his mistress!"

"Don't waste your breath. She can't understand you."

"Oh yes she can," Melchoir thought, this time remembering to keep his thoughts to himself. He stroked the mare's face. She stared back at him, her eyes mirroring his own hopelessness.[11]

Suddenly the foal popped his head out of the water and lobbed a glob of seaweed at Melchoir.

"Oh no you don't, you little snip!" Melchoir laughed as he pulled the seaweed out of his limp, brown hair and lobbed it back at the colt.

As with all children, even in the worst circumstances, the foal managed to find ways to play with his new friend, splashing Melchoir with his tail and flinging wads of seaweed back and forth to him.[12]

For several more days the crew set out the nets and spread the delicacies in the water, but there were no more bites. Finally, Baccar announced that the next day they would set sail for the Delta Towns.

Melchoir lay awake in his hammock that night, unable to sleep as he thought of the fate of the hippocampi. His own slavery was nothing compared to the lives of confined suffering that lay ahead for the mare and foal. He could do nothing to free the mare. Even if he could muscle her out of the tank, he couldn't heave her to the railing and overboard. The pulleys and winches were much too noisy to use. He could not save the mare, but he might be able to save the foal. At least, he had to try.

It was a moonless night, and Melchoir slipped easily past the dozing sailors on watch to the tank on the aft deck. Quietly he reached into the tank and stroked the mare gently to wake her. She did not start but rather lifted her head silently above the surface. Her eyes, used to the dark depths of the ocean, focused easily on Melchoir.[13] He pointed to the sleeping foal and pretended to pick something up, then pantomimed as it plopped on the deck and he started dragging it toward the rail. The mare cocked her head in confusion. Melchoir pointed to himself, then to the foal and repeated his pantomime. The

10. On dry land a hippocampus's tail becomes a deadly weapon, inflicting 1d8 points of damage. Land-bound hippocampi have two attacks per round, which can include bites, tail swings, or one of each. A victim of a tail slap must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation or be stunned for 1d3 rounds.

11. Wild hippocampi have little contact with terrestrial species, so few of them speak terrestrial languages. They have a distinct language of their own and might also understand the languages of tritons, mermen, locathah, and sea elves. Hippocampi that have prolonged contact with terrestrial beings, either willingly or forcibly, learn to understand and speak those languages.

12. Hippocampi develop quickly in the first two years. Four- to five-month old hippocampi have the mentality of ten-year-old children. By the time they are ten to eleven months old, hippocampi have matured physically and mentally to the equivalent of sixteen-year-old humans. At the age of two, they are equivalent to twenty- or twenty-five-year-old humans. Hippocampi live to be approximately fifty years old. From the age of two onward, they have the mentality of adults.

13. Hippocampi have infravision to a range of 90 yards.

mare nodded in understanding. The contradictory emotions of fear and hope for her foal clouded her face. At length she nodded with resolve.

Gently the mare nuzzled her foal to waken him. As she talked to him quietly in their language of murmured nickers and squeaks,[14] the foal's eyes filled with terror. He wrapped his tail about his mother, clinging to her side. Melchoir rubbed the foal's back and tail as the mare continued to nicker in low reassuring tones. They all realized the young foal's chances of making it back to his home pod were slim. The ocean was filled with sharks, squids, and serpents, always on the prowl for young untended hippocampi.[15] Still, it was his only chance at freedom.

Slowly the foal's fear diminished and his determination grew. With a final squeeze and nuzzle, the foal turned away from its mother and floated to the side of the tank. The mare swam beneath him, lifting the foal out of the water to the edge of the tank. As gently and quietly as possible, Melchoir rolled the foal out onto the deck. He staggered under the weight, and the foal landed with a thud on the deck.[16]

Melchoir heard some movement and a few grumbles on the foredeck. With renewed urgency he grabbed the foal's tail and began to drag him toward the rail. The foal pushed and heaved with his front legs, ripping and bloodying his delicate fins on the rough deck.

Angry shouts erupted from the sailors on watch as they leapt to their feet and ran toward the aft deck. Melchoir redoubled his efforts, frantically pulling the colt to the edge of the deck. He dropped the tail over the side, then repositioned himself against the foal's chest, pushing with all his might.

The first sailor came charging by the tank toward the escaping foal. With a mighty smack the mare's tail whipped through the night air, slamming into the sailor, sending him flying back onto the deck where he lay still, not to rise again.

Melchoir gathered the last of his strength, gave a final heave, and sent the foal overboard just beyond the grabbing hands of the crew. Water splashed up onto the deck as the foal gave a triumphant call of freedom. The grasping hands of the crew became pummeling fists on Melchoir's head, beating him into dark unconsciousness.

When Melchoir came to, he found himself chained to the mainmast. Sweat rolled off him as he lay baking in the afternoon sun. His dry throat burned with each attempt to swallow, and his bruised body ached from his beating.

"So you're awake, you scurvy little bilge rat!" Baccar spat, as he heaved his boot into Melchoir's side with brutal force. "Do you know how much you cost me?!"

"Take it out of the treasure you stole from me," Melchoir said sullenly.

Baccar let loose a jeering laugh that rained down on Melchoir with a wave of stale grog and rotten teeth. "There was never any treasure you fool. I knew that the moment I saw the map."

"But I got it off an old sailor who was dying. He said it wouldn't do him any good. He traded it for the price of a hot meal and a few nights in a ..."

"A comfortable inn where he could rest his old bones and die in peace. That was old One-Eyed Willy. He's been hoodwinking landlubbers for ten years. The old sea dog will probably outlive us all!"

"If you knew it was fake, why did you steal it from me?"

"I didn't know it was one of Willy's until I saw it. There are a few real treasures out there, you know. But it was a fake! You're too scrawny to be worth the food to keep you alive until we reach port, and now you turned our prize catch loose!" Baccar punctuated his sentence with another kick.

"That foal was worth twice what the mare'll bring, fifty times more than you'd be worth on your best day." Baccar shook his head. "The old fortune

14. The hippocampus language is designed to be intelligible under or above water. It combines whalelike squeaks with horselike nickers and whinnies.

15. The wild hippocampus's natural enemies are all large aquatic carnivores. Young hippocampi are protected by the pod. If the predator can't be outrun, the pod forms a ring around the immature hippocampi to protect them.

16. Hippocampi have a hatching weight of approximately 90 pounds, slightly smaller than the birth weights of horses. They have 1 Hit Die at birth. They grow quickly, reaching 800 pounds at a year old, when they gain a second Hit Die. At two years of age, hippocampi average about 1,000 pounds and have 3 HD. By the time they reach 3–4 years of age, hippocampi reach mature weight. Stallions average 1,400 pounds and mares average 1,200 pounds. Adult hippocampi in their prime have 4 Hit Dice.

teller at the Fiddling Crab was right. We must have set sail under a bad star. Best to be done with this voyage and start fresh. And you know what else the old hag said?" Baccar leaned close to Melchoir, staring at him with hateful, bloodshot eyes.

Melchoir shook his head meekly.

"She said to be done with whatever I brought on board this voyage, to cast it off and not try to make port with it. Have you ever heard of keel-hauling?"

Despite the hot afternoon sun, Melchoir shivered at the words. He had indeed heard of keel-hauling. He could already imagine the water covering his head as he was dragged around the barnacle-covered hull of the ship, trying not to gasp from pain as the razor sharp shells shredded his back.

Crewmen gleefully threw two ropes overboard and worked them around the hull of the ship. With a cheer, the crew unchained Melchoir and dragged him from the mainmast to the railing. They grabbed his wrists and tied them with the ropes that ran around the hull of the ship. His ankles were tied to two more ropes coiled on deck. Members of the crew argued over who would get to heave at the wrist ropes and who'd hold snug the ankle ropes until the keel-hauling sounded more like a tug of war.

Melchoir shuddered, unable to stand, unable to move, unable to resist. His eyes darted about in desperation until they caught sight of the mare. She had raised herself as high as she could in her tank. She met his gaze with one that mirrored his own horror, but which also thanked him again for saving her child. In that moment he realized that what he had done the night before was worth more than all the treasure he had hoped to find. He had wanted to be recognized, remembered as someone special. Now he would be remembered, if only by a hippocampus and her foal.

Melchoir straightened, prepared to take his last few breaths in this life. As the crew heaved him over the side, the mare gave an ear splitting, trumpeting call. Melchoir dangled upside-down against the ship, the ropes on his wrists were jerked with such force that his joints popped and ached. He heard the cheers and laughter on deck as the men on the ankle ropes slowly fed them out, holding him tight against the ship as he started the torturous trip around the hull.

There came another call from the mare on board ship. Melchoir took one final gasp of air as he was pulled under the water. The sea bubbled and churned around him, he felt tugging at the ropes binding his wrists and ankles, and they went limp. A strong back rose up underneath him, carrying him up toward the surface. As the water parted from his face, Melchoir took a deep, grateful breath. Above him on board he heard the voices of the crew rising in confusion and panic. He heard the mare call once more. The ocean's surface erupted as all about him scores of hippocampi breached, answering her call in a thunderous chorus.[17]

The enraged beasts circled the ship, slapping it with their tails, ramming it with their heads.

Off by himself, a hippocampus in deep concentration rode the rising swells. He raised his head and called to the sky. It answered with a great peel of thunder as storm clouds built over the ship. With a wave of his foreleg he commanded the lightning, sending a crackling bolt into the main mast. The wood split and creaked. The mast swayed, snapping the riggings and ripping the sails as it crashed over the side of the ship. The hippocampus then raised his tail in a circling motion. In concert, a huge wave smashed against the side of the ship.[18]

Melchoir could hear the voices of the crew. They rose in a crescendo from shouts to frantic screams as the crew felt the ship shaking and grinding beneath them, breaking apart under the sustained attack. Echoes of insane rage fringed the shrieks of the doomed crew. Melchoir thought of the mare still trapped in the tank, helpless and alone, vulnerable to the crew's hysteria. He fought through the foaming water to the side of the ship. Grabbing a rope left dangling over the side, he hauled himself up, spurred on by his fear for the mare.

Melchoir pulled himself over the side in time to see the crew picking up bludgeons as they turned toward the tank. The ship was lost, already lugging in the water, the hull breached by the the ramming hippocampi and crashing waves. Nothing could save the crew now, and all they wanted to do was take something down with them, hurt one more thing. Melchoir hesitated, not knowing what he could do against such a mob. The resounding thud of another wave crashed against the port side of the ship. The vessel listed, tilting at a crazy angle as she rode ever lower in the water.

Melchoir saw his opportunity. He grabbed a belaying pin from the pin rail. He then leapt up into the rigging, grabbed a loose stay rope, and swung out over the deck, above the heads of the crew. He dropped down on the aft deck next to the tank and began swinging the pin, whacking the corner angle iron, loosening it from the planks. The ship was listing badly. If he could loose the mare from the tank, she'd practically slide overboard across the tilted deck.

The crew charged. Vanan, in the lead, let out a banshee scream as he leaped at Melchoir. The mare swung her head full into his chest. Bones cracked and crunched as she knocked his lifeless body aside like a rag doll.

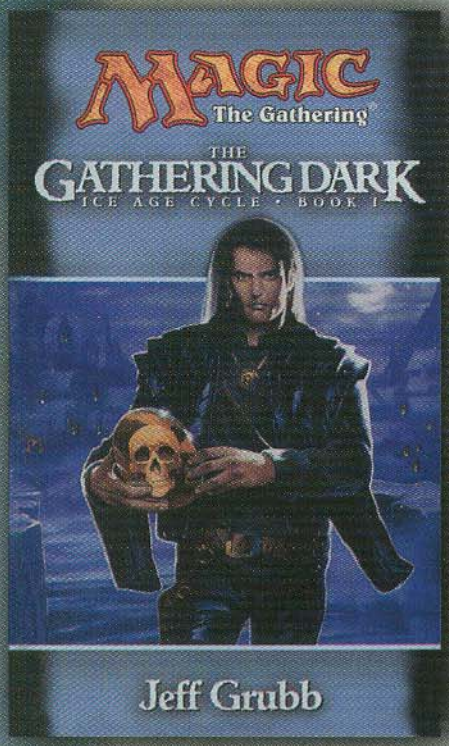
Melchoir broke the last clamp and motioned to the mare. She slammed the side of the tank with her head. The sides split apart, pouring water and the mare out upon the deck. She slid half way to the rail as hapless sailors were washed overboard past her. Like a great sea lion she gathered herself and began to lumber the last few feet to freedom, ripping and shredding her fragile forefins in her struggle. Behind her, Melchoir swung the belaying pin wildly at the remaining crew.

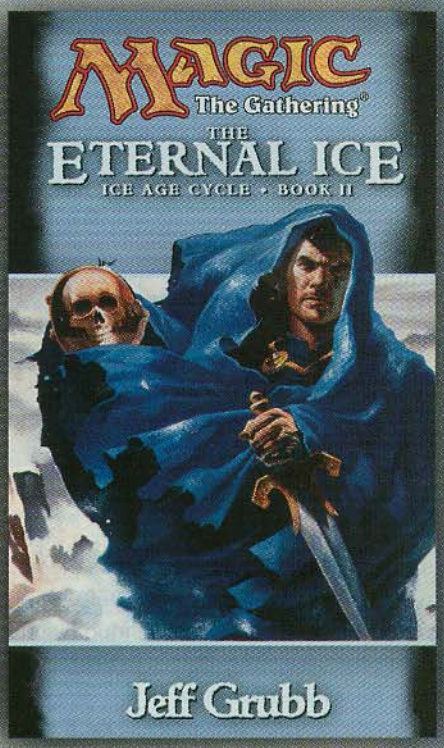
An insane roar rose, and Melchoir turned to see Baccar, legs spread, eyes wild, blocking the mare's path. He raised an evil, wickedly sharp dagger and

17. In times of crisis or battle, several pods often band together in a coordinated effort. Hippocampi tales speak of times when a "Great Herd" of thousands of hippocampi massed.

18. Hippocampi are not intrinsically magical. However, since they are intelligent beings, they can study magic and become mages or clerics. Hippocampi spellcasters generally specialize in water- and weather-based spells.

The Cold Truth





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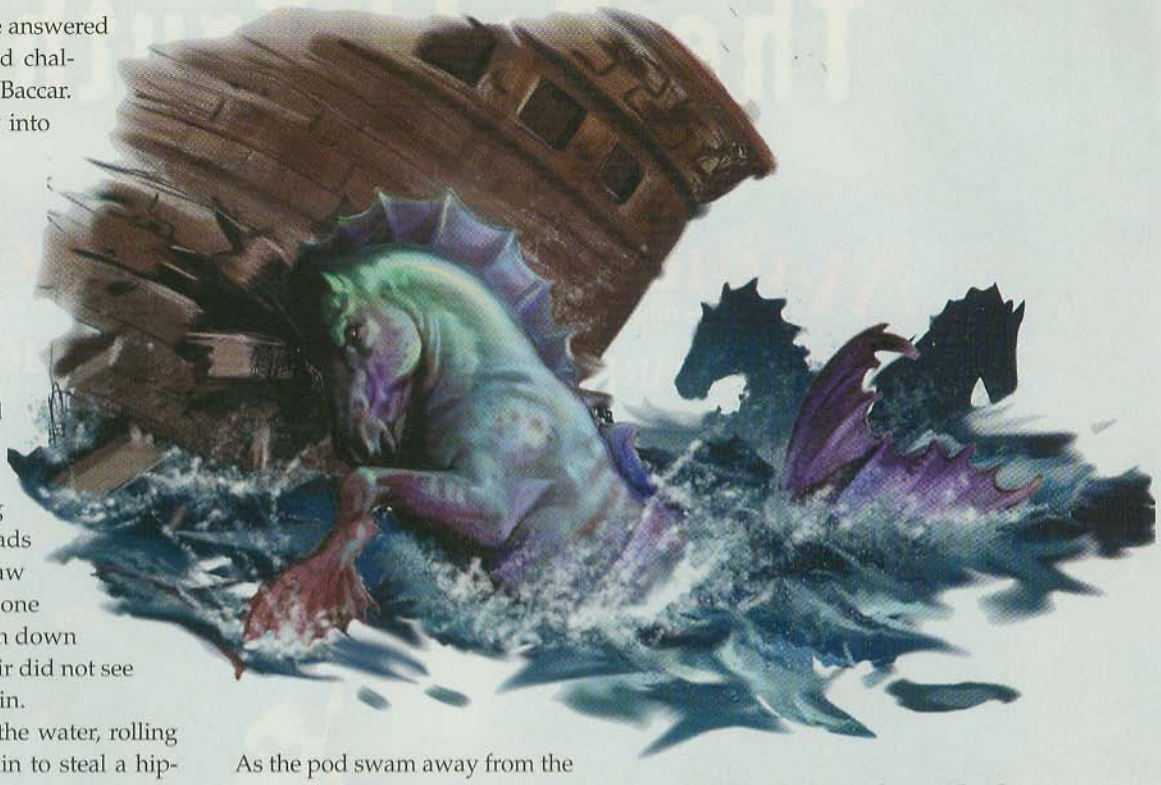
roared again. The mare answered with her own bellowed challenge and charged into Baccar. The dagger cut deeply into her shoulder as she rammed into the old pirate. Another wave crashed over the listing deck, throwing Baccar, the mare, and Melchoir from the ship.

Melchoir floundered in a sea filled with thrashing, screaming men and the lashing teeth and crushing heads of hippocampi. He saw the mare ram Baccar one more time, driving him down into the water. Melchoir did not see that wretched soul again.

The ship lugged in the water, rolling on her side, never again to steal a hippocampus from its home. As the ship began to disappear under the waves Melchoir could feel her dragging him down with her. He heard the shrieks of the crew caught in the deadly suction. Melchoir struggled against the pull, but he was too weak. Underneath him there was a reassuring nudge, then a strong back as the mare surfaced beneath him. He stroked her shoulder. The vicious gash of Baccar's dagger was already scabbed over.[19] The mare's powerful tail pushed them away from the doomed ship and the nightmare that they had endured together.

Beside them the foal rose, giddy with excitement and joy. He swam around and around his mother, squeezing her again and again with his tail. With a huge leap he landed on top of the mare, squeezing Melchoir with such enthusiasm he almost knocked out the lad. A strong, powerful, azure head rose in the water next to Melchoir. The stallion nuzzled the mare gently, then laid his front fin on Melchoir's thigh and bowed his head in respectful gratitude.



As the pod swam away from the hateful spot, Melchoir settled onto the smooth soft back of the mare and dozed in a secure, restful sleep.

"Hey! Ahoy there! Are you all right?"

The voice roused Melchoir from his sleep. He felt wet sand on his back and the gentle lapping of water on his feet.

"Are you all right, young man?" the sailor asked again as strong concerned hands helped Melchoir to his feet.

"Yes, I'm fine, I guess. Where am I?"

"You're on one of the Outer Islands. You look like you've been through hell," the sailor said, surveying Melchoir's beaten body and ragged clothes.

"I guess I have, and I'd still be there if it weren't for the hippocampi."

"Well blow me down! The Captain said 'twas the hippocampi that led him to this island. He said he knew we'd find some poor soul they'd helped out. You see, the Captain says they saved him once, and he's forever indebted."[20]

"They sure saved me, in more ways than one."

"Well gather your things. The Captain will want to talk to you straight away."

"My things?"

"Your sea chest over there."

Melchoir looked around. The tide was low on the wide sandy beach, and a sea chest lay exposed just at water's edge. Melchoir stumbled to it and opened it in disbelief. Gems, gold, and silver glittered in the morning sun.[21]

"Great jumping sea greets! You're a rich man, my boy. You must have some tale to tell. You'll be able to buy anything you want when we reach port. I'd heard there was treasure in these islands, but I never thought I'd see any of it. Why, people will come from miles just to hear ..."

But Melchoir didn't hear him. His eyes were searching the ocean beyond the waiting ship.

Margaret and Ramsey have persistently and patiently worked toward publication in DRAGON® *Magazine for the past two years ... as Margaret was sure to remind us each* GEN CON® *Game Fair. We look forward to more from them soon.*

19. The blood of hippocampi coagulates very quickly, to protect them from shark attacks. Sharks have only a 20% chance of going into a feeding frenzy from a wounded hippocampus.

20. People saved by hippocampi tend to retain a strong bond of gratitude toward them. They remain respectful of the creatures and become protective of them. These people might attack ships trying to capturehippocampi and their eggs or merchants trying to sell such products, seeing such practices as a form of slavery. Hippocampi are good judges of character, and they do not assist evil beings or those who mean them harm.

21. Hippocampi have no use for treasure. They do not adorn themselves with jewelry and have no currency. They do, however, understand its importance to humans. Hippocampi will rarely, if ever, treasure hunt for humans, but they will present their friends with gifts.

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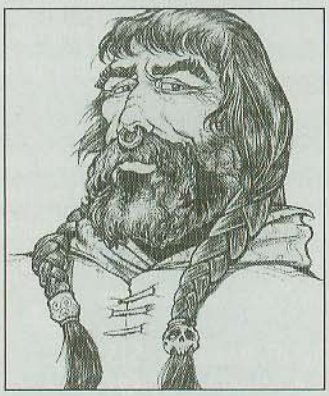

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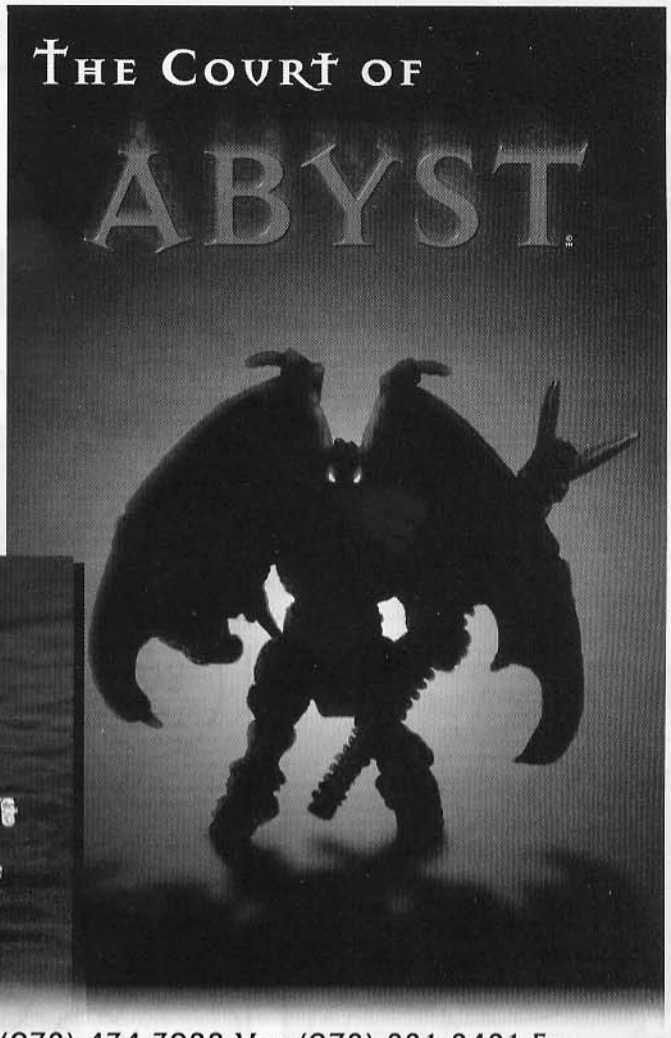

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IGOR, YOU'RE INSTANTLY INCINERATED BY ITS FIREBALL BREATH!
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WHAT? SHAKE SHAKE ROLL ROLL
PAINFULLY, I MIGHT ADD. CARSON, YOU FUMBLE YOUR SAVING ROLL. YOU'RE A GONER.
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REAL cheap! WHAT'S NEW?
BUT NOT BEFORE THE DRAGON DECIDES TO USE YOUR SPINE FOR SPAGHETTI. OUCH.
ROLL ROLL
DWEEZIL, YOU'RE NOW A WELCOME MAT FOR THE DRAGON'S LAIR. OR WHAT'S LEFT OF YOU IS.
MORTY, YOU ARE SO TOAST!
SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE
WHAT AN UGLY END... AN UGLY, HUMILIATING, SICKENING END, MORTY. YOU'LL NEVER PLAY THE VIOLIN AGAIN.
AND GILLY, YOU...
ROLL ROLL SHAKE ROLL
...MAKE AN INCREDIBLE SKILL ROLL, FLIP BACKWARDS, BOUNCE BACK BEHIND HIM, AND WITH A TRIPLE SPIN STAB AT HIS HEART AND...
ROLL ROLL ...MAKE IT ON A CRITICAL HIT! IN AN EVIL CLOUD OF TURBONIUM, THE DRAGON EXPIRES!
NEVER GET INTO A GAME WHERE THE GM HAS THE HOTS FOR A PLAYER...
THE DRAGON'S VAST HOARD IS YOURS! AFTER YOU LOOT YOUR COMPANION'S BODIES, I ASSUME...

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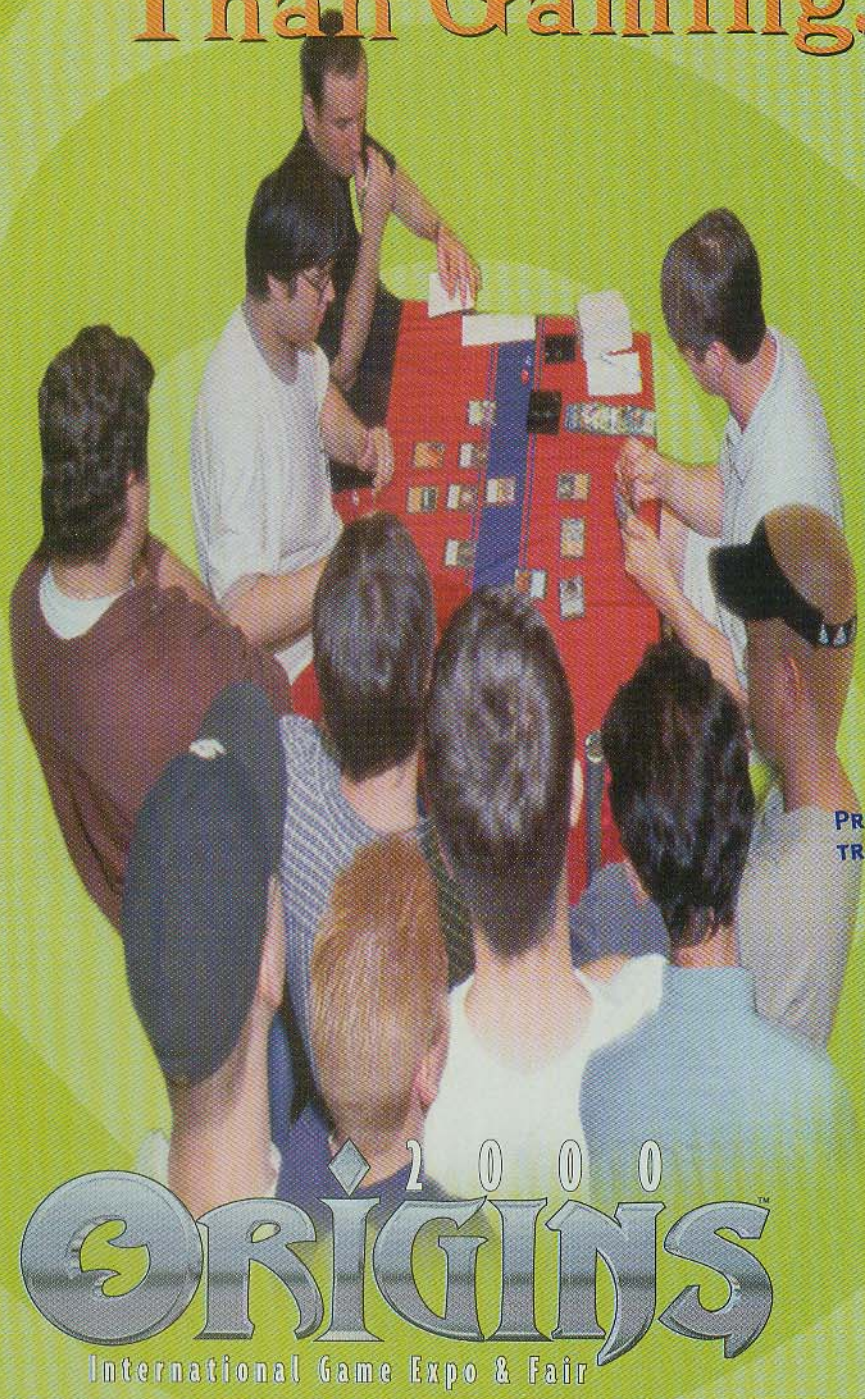

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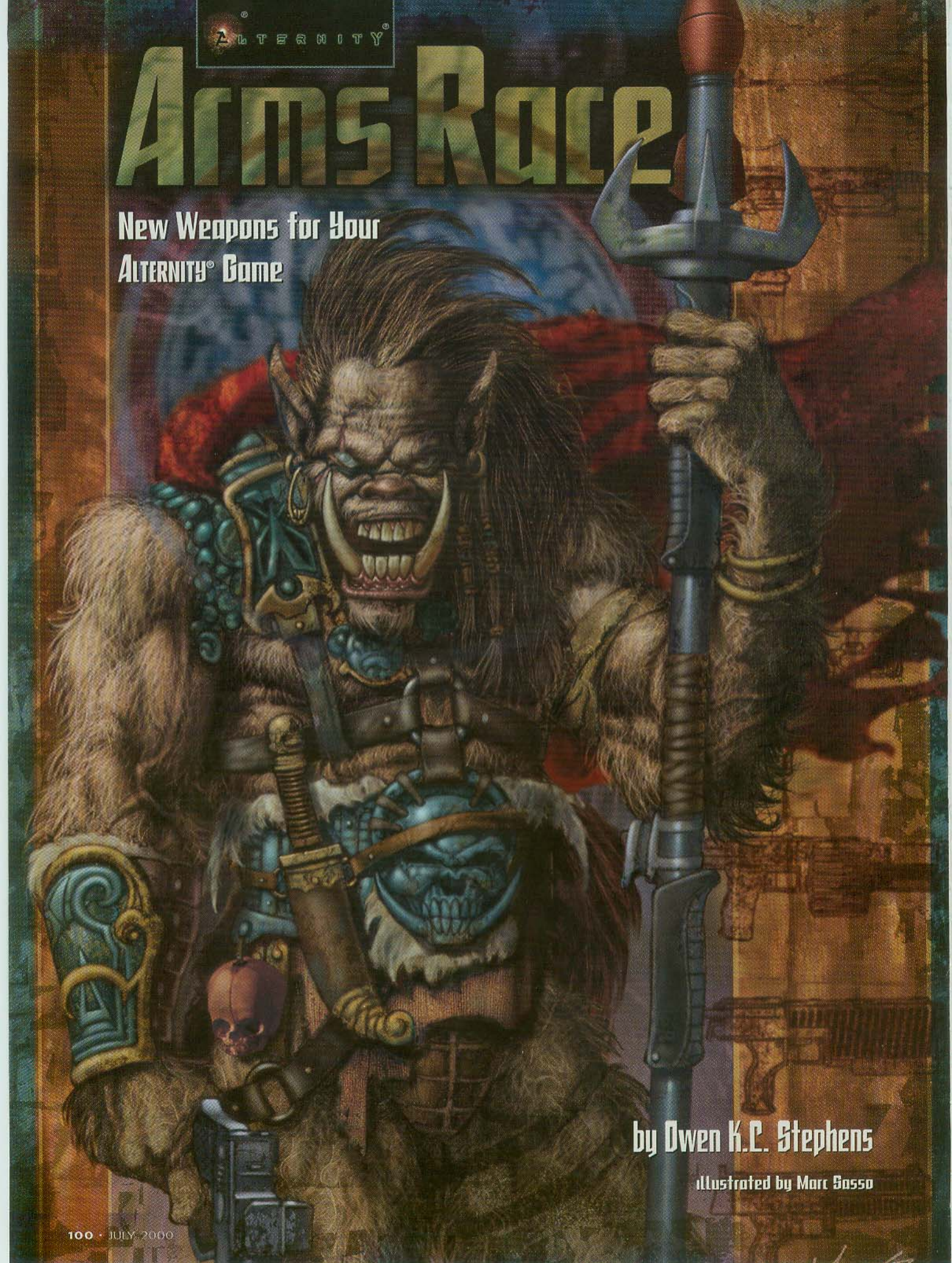


by Owen K.C. Stephens

Illustrated by Marc Sasso

All science fiction RPGs need a good selection of futuristic weapons. For that reason, the Alternity® **Player's Handbook** provides statistics for dozens of slug throwers, beam rifles, and energized melee weapons. More high-tech devices of destruction are presented in the **Arms & Equipment Guide** for the Star*Drive® setting. But all those listings combined only scratch the surface of weapons possible using the technology of the Gravity Age. In a futuristic universe of action and high adventure, new weapon systems are under constant development. And in the Star*Drive campaign setting, information on those weapons is found in **Merrick's Personal Security Report**.

Originally published as a small press journal by Colonel Jane Merrick of Austrin-Ontis, *Merrick's Personal Security Report* has become the comprehensive resource for anyone interested in state-of-the-art small arms and personal defense systems. The *Report* is not a commercial catalog but an indispensable listing of thousands of weapon systems, their specifications, and manufacturers. Although pricing information is included with each entry, these are meant simply as guidelines for the reader and should be taken as rough estimates only.

A publication of this size and reputation requires regular updates if it is to remain a useful source of information regarding the volatile market of personal arms. Since contact was reestablished with the Verge, weapons markets have been flooded almost overnight with new combat systems. As always, the most important of these innovations are included in the *Merrick's Personal Security Report* update, available in magazine format for 25 Concord dollars.

Merrick's Personal Security Report
2051 Third Quarter Update

Powered Melee Weapons

The term "powered melee weapon" refers to any hand-to-hand weapon that doesn't depend purely on the muscle power and skill of its wielder. Modern technology has found dozens of ways to improve on weapon designs thousands of years old. Gravitation control technology, explosives, monomolecular edges, advanced materials, and energy dischargers have all been incorporated into modern melee weapons. Many of these are no less lethal than modern ranged weapons.

Mjolnir 220 Rocket Maul

ThunderCorps Arms, Ltd.
Availability: Controlled
Cost: $600
Mass: 10 kg
Length: 1.5 meters
Payload: Tungsten-neutronite hammer head
Accuracy: +1 (+3)
Actions: 3 (2)
Type/Firepower: LI/O (LI/G)
Damage: d6+2s/d6+4s/d6w (d8+4s/d8+2w/d6m)
Range: Personal
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 6
Clip/charge Cost: $100
Skill: Melee Weapons–*powered*

Early rocket mauls were first developed by miners on heavy gravity worlds to break up the super-dense rock formations common there. After they were successfully used as weapons in a few Molly Maguire incidents, ThunderCorps created a line of the weapons. While the larger 330 and 420 mauls have proven too clumsy for use as weapons, the smaller 220 has gained some popularity as a heavy melee weapon with planetary militias and freebooters.

The rocket maul can be used with or without the rocket boost. The statistics in parentheses are for a rocket-assisted blow,

six of which can be made before refueling the maul. A character swinging the maul under rocket power must make an ordinary Strength feat check to retain hold of the weapon if he doesn't secure the weapon to his hand in some fashion before activating the boost. Failure sends the maul 1d6 meters in a random direction.

Patriot II Explosive Lance

Pulan-Tough Job Corporation
Availability: Military
Cost: $250
Mass: 2 kg
Length: 2 meters
Payload: Various grenades
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Type/Firepower: by warhead
Damage: by warhead
Range: Personal
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 1
Clip/charge Cost: by warhead
Skill: Melee Weapons–*powered*

The Patriot II Explosive Lance is an attempt to sell high-tech gear to weren by giving it a more familiar appearance. The lance is essentially a long titanium pole to which a grenade warhead has been mounted. The grenade detonates on any strong impact.

Any grenade type can be attached as a warhead. Damage is doubled against any target struck, and the area of effect is reduced to ⅒ that of an Ordinary hit. An Amazing hit with a lance tipped with a fragmentation grenade would therefore inflict (d6+2w)×2 to its target and have a blast radius of only 1 meter. Occasionally, that still means the attacker is within the area of effect. For this reason, most explosive lances are armed with AP grenade warheads.

Dragonfist 20 Stun-Chuks

Koshimi Industries
Availability: Controlled
Cost: $535
Mass: 2.5 kg
Length: 95 cm
Payload: Electrical shock
Accuracy: +1
Actions: 4
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: d6s/d8s/d12s
Range: Personal
Hide: +2
Clip/charge Size: 10
Clip/charge Cost: $75
Skill: Melee Weapons–*powered* or Unarmed Attack–*defensive martial arts*

Many variations on the stun baton have been introduced over the years, but few of them have been useful enough to be worth mentioning. The Dragonfist 20, however, is a genuinely unique approach to stun baton design. By attaching two small stun batons with a tungsten-neutronite cable, Koshimi Industries has managed to create a weapon that is very effective, if somewhat more difficult to use.

A user with at least four ranks of Melee Weapons–*powered* or Unarmed Attack–*defensive martial arts* can ignore any improvement to a target's Strength resistance modifier that comes from the target's rank benefit with a melee weapon skill. Additionally, the Dragonfist 20 might short out powered weapons it successfully parries, forcing the opposing weapon to make a Stamina–*endurance* check or malfunction. However, these "stun-chuks" cannot be controlled with the precision of simpler stun batons, and on any Critical Failure, the user inflicts Ordinary damage (d6s) on herself.

AVX Neural Whip

SekureTek Group
Availability: Military
Cost: $1,000
Mass: 2 kg
Length: 135 cm
Payload: Neural shock
Accuracy: +1
Actions: 2
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: Special
Range: Personal
Hide: +2
Clip/charge Size: 8
Clip/charge Cost: $150
Skill: Melee Weapons–*powered*

Utilizing the same technology developed for psi-restraints, the AVX neural whip uses a charged monofilament to short out a target's mental processes. Although the weapon causes little real damage (1s/1d4s/1d4+1s), any target hit by the neural whip is forced to make a Resolve–*mental resolve* check or be knocked unconscious (losing all his stun boxes). This check has a modifier based on the degree of success rolled on the neural whip's attack (Ordinary –1, Good +0, Amazing +1). Characters in armor are allowed to roll their Energy protection dice and receive an additional –1 step bonus to their *mental resolve* check for every point of energy damage the armor negates.

Additionally, any character attempting to activate a psionic power who is struck by the whip in the same phase suffers a +2 penalty to his *mental resolve* check.

Templar 27-N Power Sword

Austrin Limited, Federal State of Algemron
Availability: Military
Cost: $1,350
Mass: 5 kg
Length: 115 cm
Payload: Monomolecular edge
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Type/Firepower: LI/G
Damage: d8w/d8+1w/d4m
Range: Personal
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 16
Clip/charge Cost: $125
Skill: Melee Weapons–*powered*

A faster and lighter weapon than a chainsword, the Templar 27-N power sword consists of two serrated monomolecular blades that are sandwiched together and saw back and forth hundreds of times per second. This weapon

was developed by the Federal State Intelligence Directorate on Galvin and is manufactured exclusively by Austrin Limited, an old branch of what is now Austrin-Ontis Unlimited. Although the weapon is fairly rare outside of the Federal State of Algemron, it might become more common if Austrin Limited ever reunited with Austrin-Ontis.

Charge Pistols

The ultimate in slug-throwing weapons, charge weapons use an electric firing action to ensure steady, sturdy, and cheap firepower. Once thought to be nearly obsolete compared to newer energy weapons, the raw and untamed worlds of the Verge have shown the need for weapons that can be relied upon even under extreme conditions. The renewed popularity of these old standby weapons has resulted in a resurgence of new charge pistol designs.

Holdout 9mm Derringer

Dietterlich Industries
Availability: Common
Cost: $300
Mass: 0.5 kg
Length: 8 cm
Payload: 9 mm bullet
Accuracy: –1
Actions: 2
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: HI/O
Damage: d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m
Range: 4/8/20 meters
Hide: +5
Clip/charge Size: 2
Clip/charge Cost: $10
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

An old idea updated with modern technology, the Holdout is a very small two-barrel charge pistol designed to hold only two rounds. The small size of its ammunition aids in the Holdout's compact design, but with a muzzle velocity of 4,500 meters per second, its tumbling round can inflict respectable damage. What the Holdout loses when compared to more standard pistol designs, it gains in concealability. Early versions of this weapon were first introduced on Alaundril, and the Dietterlich Industries model has since become a common weapon for gamblers, sightseers, and businessmen touring the rough-and-ready space of the Verge.

Pinnacle-IV 11mm Pepperbox

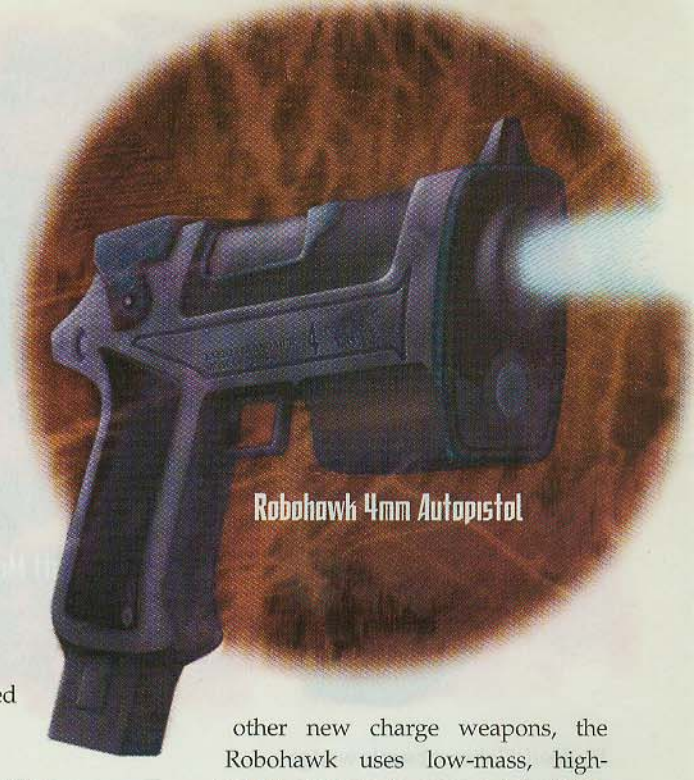
Dietterlich Industries
Availability: Common
Cost: $425
Mass: 0.75 kg
Length: 14 cm
Payload: 11 mm bullet
Accuracy: –1
Actions: 4
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: HI/O
Damage: d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m
Range: 5/10/40
Hide: +3
Clip/charge Size: 4
Clip/charge Cost: $25
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

A larger and more powerful four-barrel version of the Holdout, the Pinnacle-IV is more popular with miners and archeologists in the Verge, who often need its heavier firepower as protection against local predators. Its solid construction makes the Pinnacle-IV a particularly sturdy weapon, providing it with a –1 bonus to any Stamina–*endurance* checks it's forced to make. However, as a weapon that has only become popular within a niche market, sales of Pepperboxes have lagged behind those of other small pistols.

Robohawk 4mm Autopistol

Soze Arms, Ltd.
Availability: Restricted
Cost: $1,835
Mass: 1.8 kg
Length: 28 cm
Payload: 4 mm bullet
Accuracy: +1
Actions: 4
Mode: F/B
Type/Firepower: HI/O
Damage: d4w/d6w/d4m
Range: 8/16/40
Hide: +1
Clip/charge Size: 30 rounds/10 bursts
Clip/charge Cost: $60
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

This large pistol is designed to give military-style rapid firepower without taking up the space of an SMG or rifle. Like other new charge weapons, the Robohawk uses low-mass, high-velocity bullets to cram a lot of firepower into a smaller package. Because it's built by Soze Arms, consumers can be sure it is designed to inflict a lot of damage. Although it lacks the full-auto capacity of larger charge weapons, the Robohawk's rate of fire far surpasses anything in its size class.

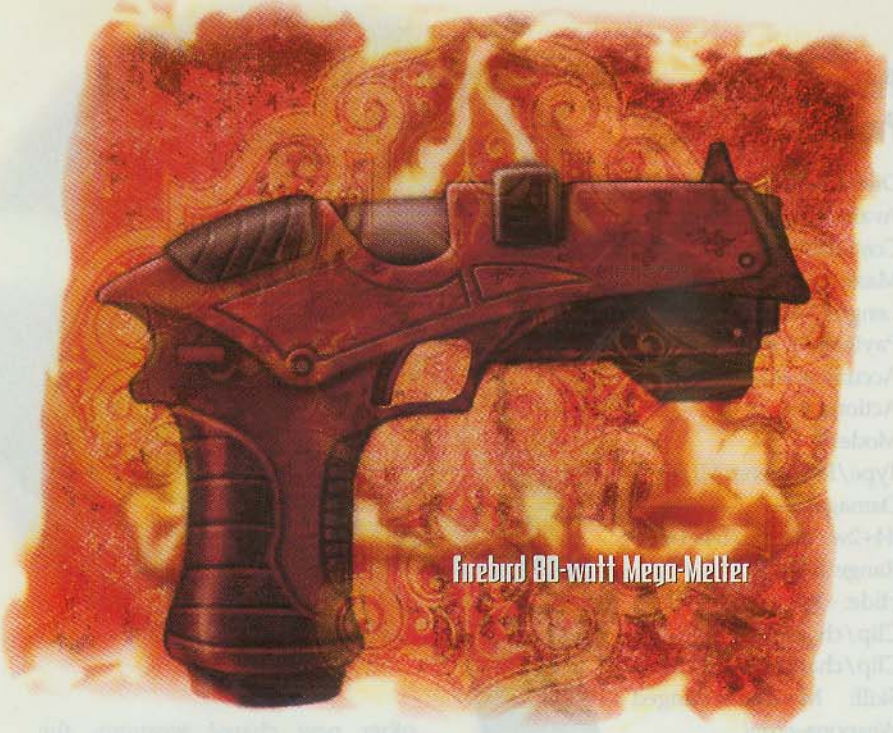

Robohawk 4mm Autopistol

Sonic Weapons

Although stutter guns could be considered sonic weapons due to their use of compressed waves of air, true sonic weapons are a relatively new addition to the marketplace. These medium-range weapons, often called screamers, create wedges of coherent sound capable of cutting steel or shattering someone's eardrums. Although these weapons share the stutter guns' inability to work in a vacuum, they are far more damaging than most stutter weapons. Unlike stutter guns, screamers have the added advantage of practically ignoring any armor that doesn't cover a target's ears. Partial armors such as CF long coats and cerametal mail suffer a –3 step penalty when attempting to prevent screamer damage.

Banshee Mk IV Screamer Pistol

MRA Technologies, Inc.
Availability: Controlled
Cost: $1,425
Mass: 1.1 kg
Length: 22 cm



Payload: Coherent sonic wedge
Accuracy: –1
Actions: 2
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: LI/G
Damage: d6+2s/d8+2s/d6+2w
Range: 6/12/30 meters
Hide: +2
Clip/charge Size: 10 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $70
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

Although few sonic weapons are currently on the market, the Banshee Mk IV has already shown itself to be a cut above the rest. It has better range and stopping power than most screamers, and is priced more reasonably as well. This weapon is proving popular with private security forces and bodyguards who need a gun with more stopping power than a stutter pistol but have no wish to deal with the ricochets and collateral damage caused by more powerful weapons.

Banshee Mk IX Screamer SMG

MRA Technologies, Inc.
Availability: Controlled
Cost: $2,150
Mass: 3.25 kg
Length: 40 cm
Payload: Coherent sonic wedge
Accuracy: –1
Actions: 3
Mode: B/A
Type/Firepower: LI/G
Damage: d6+2s/d8+2s/d6+2w
Range: 10/20/60 meters
Hide: +1
Clip/charge Size: 25 bursts
Clip/charge Cost: $250
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*SMG*

As popular as the Banshee Mk IV seems to be, the larger and more powerful Banshee Mk IX has yet to gain any following. The weapon is too big to be popular for police work and lacks the heavy damage provided by other weapons in its class. It does have the advantage of working just as well in water as it does in air, but this minor point has yet to lead to many sales. It might be that screamer technology has not yet advanced enough for a SMG class weapon to be viable.

Melter Guns

These direct-fire energy weapons are a prime example of weapon development within the Verge, and they are common in several worlds' military organizations. They use concentrated beams of microwave radiation to burn or melt their targets. Although the weapons are capable of tremendous damage, they are less able to penetrate armor than most energy weapons. Because of this, any armor struck by a melter gun rolls its largest die to stop the damage, even if that die is normally used for the LI or HI damage categories. On an Amazing hit, melter guns cause flammable objects to ignite, inflicting d4+2 wounds to the target and anyone touching it each round thereafter.

VMP 40-watt Melter Pistol

StarMech Edge One Division
Availability: Controlled
Cost: $1,600
Mass: 1.25 kg
Length: 25 cm
Payload: Microwave radiation beam
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+2m
Range: 10/20/50 meters
Hide: +2
Clip/charge Size: 12 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $125
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

The very first melter weapon made by a company outside of the Verge, the VMP 40 pistol is quickly gaining popularity with military forces. Currently in the running for this year's prestigious Merrick's Triple-Bullseye rating, the VMP 40 already has a reputation as a hard-hitting and reliable weapon.

Firebird 80-watt Mega-Melter

Soze Arms, Ltd.
Availability: Military
Cost: $3,425
Mass: 3 kg
Length: 50 cm
Payload: Microwave radiation beam
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Mode: B/A
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: 2d4w/2d4+2w/d8m
Range: 10/20/50 meters
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 6 bursts
Clip/charge Cost: $125
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*SMG*

The Firebird is a tribute to Soze Arms' design principle, trading range and endurance for raw damage. Although the Firebird is too new for extensive field reports, it is already popular with disreputable mercenaries and strong-men. It's heavy firepower is particularly effective against soft targets, such as rioters and other civilians, but that lethality makes it

unacceptable to most police forces. Although only time can say for sure, the Firebird might become a hallmark of tyrants and criminals.

Phoenix 200-watt Assault Melter

Soze Arms, Ltd.
Availability: Military
Cost: $7,350
Mass: 6.5 kg
Length: 75 cm
Payload: Microwave radiation beam
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 2
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: En/G
Damage: 2d4+2w/2d6+2w/2d6m
Range: 15/30/75 meters
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 30 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $125
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*rifle*

Although the short range and low endurance of the Firebird seems to doom it to illicit use, the heavier Phoenix might gain acceptance with some military groups as an assault weapon against hardened targets. It still suffers the lack of armor penetration common to all melter weapons, but the Phoenix's high damage output makes such concerns moot. Tests of the Phoenix against a suit of Tiger Mod 6 powered armor were so impressive that even the weapon's lack of burst fire or full-auto capacity might be overlooked.

Repulser Weapons

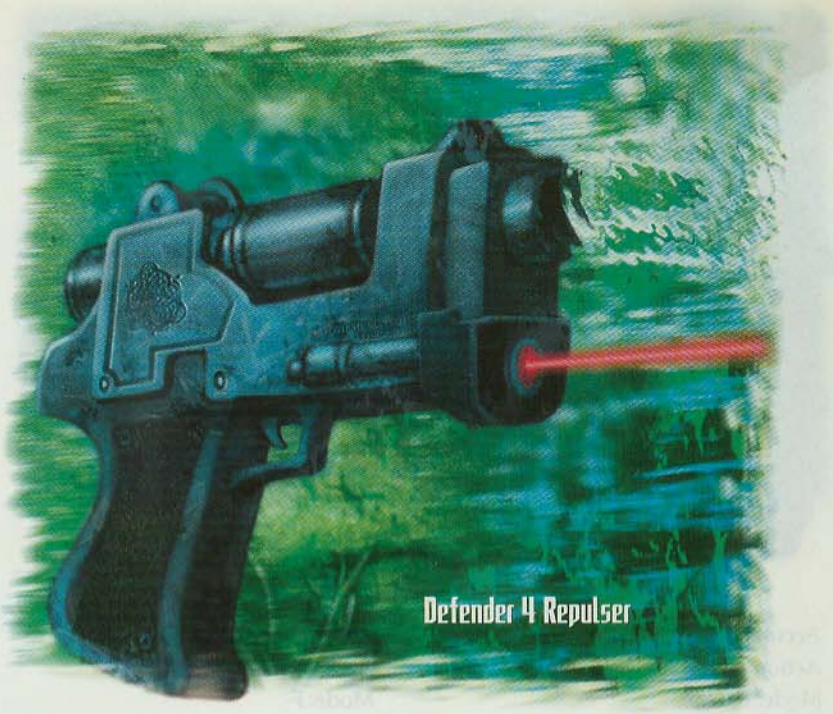
Repulsers work on the same gravity manipulation technology as renders. However, instead of setting up conflicting tidal gravitational forces within a target, the repulsers send a tremendous wave of repelling gravitons into the target. Although these weapons do relatively little damage, their good range and unique stopping power have made them popular with several police and security forces.

Stalwart ZF Repulser Pistol

StarMech Edge One Division
Availability: Restricted
Cost: $1,325
Mass: 1.75 kg
Length: 20 cm
Payload: Graviton beam
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: d4s/d4w/d6w
Range: 20/40/100 meters
Hide: +2
Clip/charge Size: 20 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $100
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

The Stalwart ZF was developed by StarMech Edge One Division from their Z-LOC render rifle. In addition to hitting a target, the repulser throws a man-sized target back 1d4 meters on an Ordinary hit, 1d6 meters on a Good hit, and 1d8 meters on an Amazing hit. Targets larger than man-sized are merely knocked down. If the target hits a solid, upright object before traveling the full distance, she takes stun damage equal to the number of meters she was thrown.

Although the Stalwart ZF is very popular with some security organizations, it simply doesn't do enough damage to gain widespread acceptance.



Defender 4 Repulser

Austrin-Ontis Unlimited
Availability: Restricted
Cost: $1,825
Mass: 3.75 kg
Length: 50 cm
Payload: Graviton beam
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Mode: F/B/A
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: d6s/d6w/d4m
Range: 40/80/200 meters
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 10 bursts/30 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $100
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*SMG*

Not long after the release of the Stalwart ZF, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited released its own larger repulser weapons. The Defender 4 is a large and powerful SMG, capable of knocking down a small roomful of opponents. In addition to hitting a target, the Defender 4 throws a man-sized target back 1d8 meters on an Ordinary hit, 1d12 on a Good hit, and 4d6 on an Amazing hit. For every doubling of mass beyond man-sized, the weapon throws an object half as far. If the target hits a solid, upright object before traveling the full distance, he takes stun damage equal to the number of meters he was thrown.

Although still a novelty among Austrins, the Defender 4 promises to be seen and sold throughout the Stellar Ring and the Verge very soon.

Avenger 5 Repulser Rifle

Austrin-Ontis Unlimited
Availability: Restricted
Cost: $4,220
Mass: 5 kg
Length: 85 cm
Payload: Graviton beam

Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Mode: F/B/A
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: d8s/d8w/d6m
Range: 60/120/300 meters
Hide: —
Clip/charge Size: 10 bursts/30 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $100
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*rifle*

The Avenger 5 is an oddity among rifles. Although its damage output falls far short of other energy rifles, its ability to toss around things the size of a weren or a suit of AAS-23 Titan assault armor has certain tactical possibilities. The Avenger 5 can throw a target twice the size of a man back 1d12 meters on an Ordinary hit, 3d6 on a Good hit, and 3d12 on an Amazing hit. Every doubling of a target's mass halves the distance the target is thrown. If the target hits a solid, upright object before traveling the full distance, she takes stun damage equal to the number of meters she was thrown.

Miscellaneous Direct Fire Weapons

There are numerous weapons that incorporate many of the unusual beams and particles discovered by scientists. Most of these never get past the stage of experimental models, but a few have become common enough to deserve mention here.

X-LOK Render Pistol

StarMech Edge One Division
Availability: Restricted
Cost: $1,450
Mass: 1.5 kg
Length: 30 cm
Payload: Graviton beam
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 4
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: En/O
Damage: d4+1s/d4+1w/d4m
Range: 10/20/50 meters
Hide: +2
Clip/charge Size: 12 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $75
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

Although far less popular than the larger Z-LOC render rifle, the X-LOK has the advantages of concealability and speed. Its low damage is offset by its excellent armor penetration. Armor is reduced to its minimum protection value against an X-LOK's attack. For example, cerametal armor normally stops d6 points of energy damage, but against the X-LOK it only stops 1 point, the minimum possible (no roll allowed).

G12 Plasma Pistol

A.M. Industries, Orion League
Availability: Military
Cost: $2,175
Mass: 2 kg
Length: 25 cm
Payload: Incandescent plasma
Accuracy: 0
Actions: 3
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: En/G
Damage: 2d4w/2d4+1w/2d4+2w
Range: 20/40/100
Hide: +1
Clip/charge Size: 3
Clip/charge Cost: $100
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

The G12 plasma pistol follows the same design principle as sabot and flechette pistols, providing heavy firepower in a small weapon at the expense of good ammo capacity or range. Although rarely used by military forces. It has also gained some popularity with independent explorers, who often prefer one-shot stopping power to other considerations.

Ph60 Flash Gun

Karadnya-Brusilev Industries
Availability: Common
Cost: $650
Mass: 1 kg
Length: 22 cm
Payload: Non-coherent light
Accuracy: –1
Actions: 4
Mode: F
Type/Firepower: NA
Damage: NA
Range: 20/45/100
Hide: +3
Clip/charge Size: 45 shots
Clip/charge Cost: $50
Skill: Modern Ranged Weapons–*pistol*

The Ph60 flash pistol is a weapon designed to confuse or incapacitate a target without injuring him. It creates a very tightly focused beam of bright, strobing light that can blind and occasionally knock out an opponent. A target hit by a flash gun must make a Resolve–*physical resolve* check or be blinded for 1d6 rounds on an Ordinary hit, 1d8 rounds on a Good hit, and 1d12 rounds on an Amazing hit. Tinted eyewear, environmental suits, or powered armor helmets provide a –1, –2, or –3 step bonus to the *physical resolve* check. Because the bright strobe light can temporarily cause a target's mental capabilities to temporarily short out, an Amazing hit requires the target to make a Stamina–*endurance* check to avoid being knocked unconscious, in addition to the *physical resolve* check.

*Owen Stephens is a big fan of science fiction, especially the kind of epic galactic adventure found in the Star*Drive universe. He waited in line for a day to get tickets to see The Phantom Menace and also plans to camp in front of his local game store for the week leading up to the release of the new Star Wars RPG later this year.*

TRANSMISSIONS

By Andy Collins, JD Wiker, and Jeff "Zippy" Quick

Mallory is already gone, and I do not believe I shall survive this night. I should never have let him talk me into the ascent. When Somervell and Norton both failed, we should have realized that "Sagarmatha" didn't want her summit reached. I had thought the Sherpas merely superstitious after the deaths of Shamsherpun and Manbahadur earlier in the climb, but I should have heeded their warnings.

I have begun hallucinating. I see figures in the darkness, standing just beyond my vision. I call out to them, thinking that Odell and the others have come to rescue me, but they never answer. I would fear insanity, though I believe it academic, since I won't live long enough to be examined by any doctor. Perhaps the photos I have taken with Odell's camera will one day be recovered by those who come after us.

The last of my oxygen will soon be gone. After that, I imagine death will feel much like a welcome slumber, though in this case it will be the Grim Reaper, and not Morpheus, who comes to greet me.

Gamemaster Hints

The journal entry was written by 22-year-old Andrew "Sandy" Irvine who, along with noted climber George Mallory, was part of a British ascent of Mt. Everest in 1924–29 years before the historic climb of Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. When they disappeared on June 8 only a few hundred meters below the summit, they were assumed to have died in the ascent. Mallory's preserved body was found in May of 1999, lending credence to this opinion. However, Irvine's body, along with the camera they took with them that day, has never been found.

Did Irvine also perish on Everest, or did he encounter something unusual near the summit? A Grey station-ship is hidden in the area, and both the yeti and the Kha-glor monks have been known to wander throughout the Himalayas. Perhaps he was rescued from death by one of these beings. And who knows what pictures might still be preserved within the Kodak Vestpocket Model B camera he carried?

For more on this mystery, check out the following websites:

www.mountainzone.com

www.everestnews.com/jochen5.htm

www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/everest/lost/mystery/index.html

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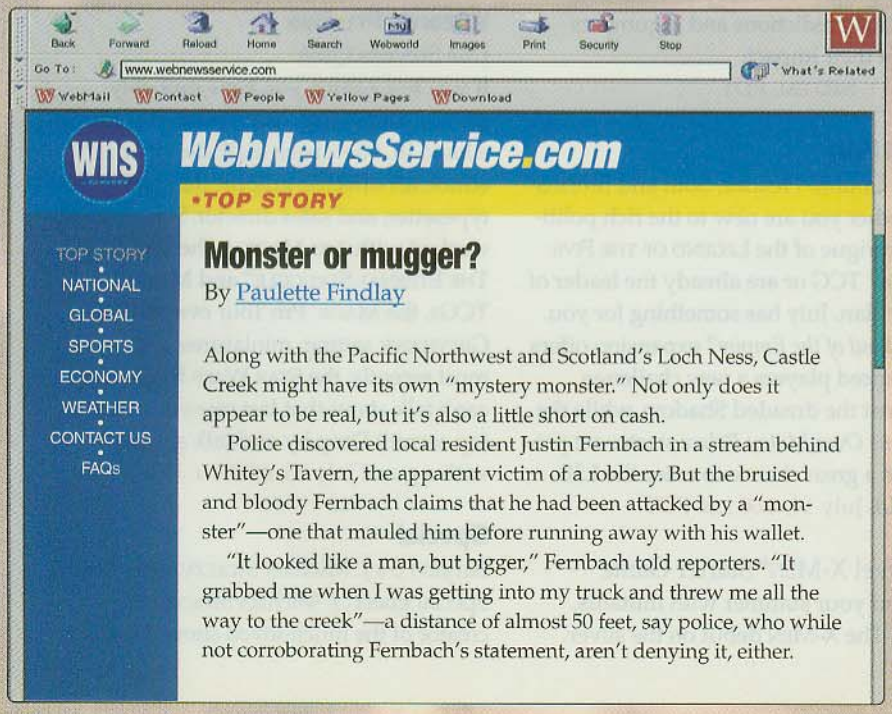
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FAQs
Monster or mugger?
By Paulette Findlay
Along with the Pacific Northwest and Scotland's Loch Ness, Castle Creek might have its own "mystery monster." Not only does it appear to be real, but it's also a little short on cash.
Police discovered local resident Justin Fernbach in a stream behind Whitey's Tavern, the apparent victim of a robbery. But the bruised and bloody Fernbach claims that he had been attacked by a "monster"—one that mauled him before running away with his wallet.
"It looked like a man, but bigger," Fernbach told reporters. "It grabbed me when I was getting into my truck and threw me all the way to the creek"—a distance of almost 50 feet, say police, who while not corroborating Fernbach's statement, aren't denying it, either.

Gamemaster Hints

This adventure hook introduces the heroes to a new kind of lifeform: the throwback. A throwback is a human of a variety not seen for centuries, but somehow born today (perhaps as a mutation, or due to a long, hidden line of parallel human development). The throwback is an alien to the culture of modern man, responding only to its own needs for food and shelter.

The throwback that attacked Justin Fernbach did so because it felt threatened. After throwing him into the ditch behind the tavern, it pummeled him until other humans appeared, then fled into a nearby woods. There, it lurks safely hidden–though a nearby land development is scheduled to destroy the woods. When the bulldozers arrive, the throwback will attack the drivers to defend its home. The heroes must stop it, or the development project, before that happens.

DARK MATTER®

July Events

Wizards.community™

From the Dragon's Mouth

Swashbuckling!

Bring the latest issue of *Dragon® Magazine* and *Dungeon® Adventures*, and chat with the editors about Swashbuckling campaigns. July 2, 6:00 P.M. PDT

RPGA Tonight

No chat on July 4 holiday.

Living Greyhawk Pre-launch Introduction

At the Gen Con® game fair, the RPGA® network launches its boldest Living campaign ever: the Living Greyhawk™ campaign. This setting lets you play in a nation of the Greyhawk® setting that is assigned to you based on where you live. Since the whole world of the Greyhawk setting is being explored somewhere, the campaign takes place around the world. Members of the Circle of Six, the campaign's guiding council, will tell you about the launch activities at the Gen Con game fair and let you know how to get involved where you live. July 18, 6:00 P.M. PDT

RPG Hour

Wizards Meets Blizzard: Starcraft and Diablo II RPGs

Wizards of the Coast teams up with Blizzard Entertainment to bring role-playing to the universes of the Starcraft and Diablo games. Talk with designer David Eckleberry about the details of bringing *Starcraft* to the tabletop and designer Jeff Grubb about creating a boxed-set adventure for *Diablo's* dark halls. July 7, 6:00 P.M. PDT

3rd Edition D&D Sorcerers

The 3rd Edition D&D® game brings a whole new class to the table: sorcerers. A totally different type of spellcaster from priests and wizards, sorcerers have distinct advantages for those of us short on memory but long on charm .... Skip Williams teases us one last time in chat before D-Day, or rather, D&D-Day. July 21, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Designers' Guild

The *Externals* Star*Drive® Accessory

Just beyond the Hammer's Star system lie the mysterious Externals. With the *Externals* accessory, we are finally shown the face of the enemy. Will your heroes be the first to encounter kadaran butchers or a sifarv hunter hawk? The *Externals* is the first downloadable interactive software to be released by Wizards of the Coast. July 9, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Deck Deconstruction Seminar

Hot *Prophecy* Cards

What hot new *Prophecy*™ cards do you think are going to shake up the tournament environment? Randy's picks are posted at **http://www.wizards.com/chat/DeckPoll.asp** where you can vote on the cards you'd like him to focus on for the night. Then come to the chat to hear his predictions and arguments about their impact. July 11, 5:00 P.M. PDT

TCG Hour

L5R Double-Header: Soul and Storms

Whether you are new to the rich political intrigue of the Legend of the Five Rings™ TCG or are already the leader of your clan, July has something for you. The *Soul of the Empire*™ expansion offers advanced players a new challenge against the dreaded Shadow, while the *Storms Over Matsu Palace* starter set provides a great chance to enter the L5R world. July 14, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Marvel X-Men® Starter Game

Spend your summer with mutants, bub! The X-Men debut on the silver screen and in their own card game this July. Chat with designer Mike Fitzgerald and brand manager Steve Horvath as they discuss the game mechanics of this adamantium-tough TCG. July 28, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Industry Edge

Introduction to Organized Play

Have you always wondered about the fuss over the Magic: The Gathering Pro Tour™ events but didn't know where to go to find out about it? Heard of the DCI™ league but just don't understand what it does? Or maybe you just need to know where you can go to play your killer mono-blue if you don't want to end up ticking off all your friends with a three-turn kill. Jeff Donais and Diana Johns explain how organized play, or "OP," offers you a place to play in a fun environment with others who enjoy the game. It challenges you to meet the objectives and rewards good play with cool prizes. July 16, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Wizards Profiles

Lisa Stevens Q&A

If you're a gamer, you have probably played something Lisa Stevens has had a hand in. She's been it all: designer, editor, art director, graphic designer, typesetter, and sales director. She worked with Ars Magica, the Vampire: The Eternal Struggle™ and Magic® TCGs, the Magic Pro Tour events, the Greyhawk setting, miniatures, and most recently, the Star Wars RPG! (She can't talk about that last one yet ... it's top secret!) Drop by and talk gaming with a guru! July 25, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Special

Babylon 5's J. Michael Straczynski

Special guest , J. Michael Straczynski, creator of the much-loved show *Babylon*

WIZARDS.COMmunity chat site also hosts weekly online help chats for the POKÉMON and MAGIC card games in the TCG Forum, and a number of in-character roleplaying games run by WizOs and site members alike. For the most up-to-date information, visit the calendars located at:
www.wizards.com/chat

JULY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2 From the Dragon's Mouth: Swashbuckling!	3 HQ Time at RPGA	4 No chat on the holiday.	5 LIVING CITY Time RPGA Writers' Workshop	6	7 RPG Hour: Wizards meets Blizzard	8
9 Designer's Guild: *Externals*	10 HQ Time at RPGA	11 Deck Deconstruction: Hot *Prophecy*	12 LIVING CITY Time	13	14 TCG Hour: L5R Double-Header	15 Totally Twisted Trivia
16 Industry Edge: Introduction to Organized Play	17 HQ Time at RPGA	18 LIVING GREYHAWK Pre-launch Introduction	19 LIVING CITY Time RPGA Writers' Workshop	20	21 RPG Hour: 3rd Edition Sorcerers	22
23 Sage Advice Live	24 HQ Time at RPGA	25 Wizards Profiles: Lisa Stevens	26 LIVING CITY Time	27	28 TCG Hour: Marvel X-MEN Starter Game	29
30 Special: J. Michael Straczynski	31 HQ Time at RPGA					

5, has a new story in *AMAZING® Stories* magazine! In "Space, Time, and the Incurable Romantic," the popular author reveals some surprising events when he jumps ahead three hundred years from where the show's finale left off. Chat with him about the story's details and his upcoming appearance at the GEN CON game fair. July 30, 6:00 P.M. PDT

RPGA Forum Weekly Chats

HQ Time at RPGA

Every Monday, you'll find RPGA Headquarters staff in the RPGA Forum. Staff will answer questions and shoot the breeze with you (but not engage in in-character chat), so come on by! July 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31, 6:00 P.M. PDT

LIVING CITY Time

Every Wednesday, you'll find a LIVING CITY™ board member in the RPGA Forum ready to answer your questions about our most popular Living campaign. This is your chance to verify rumors, ask questions, and give your suggestions to the campaign board. July 5, 12, 19, and 26, 6:00 P.M. PDT

RPGA Members Writer's Workshop

Robert Wiese hosts a writer's workshop in the RPGA Events room (accessed through the RPGA Forum) for veteran and budding roleplaying scenario writers. This session is designed to help people become better adventure designers and will get in-depth into topics involved in writing adventure scenarios; this is not a Q&A session. Designed for Guild-level RPGA members, others are welcome to listen, but we discuss only Guild-level members scenarios, and only Guild-level members receive scenarios to read before the sessions. July 5 and 19, 6:00 P.M. PDT

Dungeoncraft

Need Help?

Send your questions and anecdotes about running AD&D® game adventures to:

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℅ *Dragon Magazine*
1801 Lind Avenue S.W.
Renton, WA 98055

Send email to
dmail@wizards.com

By Ray Winninger

Traditionally, the best way to learn how to DM is to play in a few games run by a veteran Dungeon Master. In many ways, the fine art of Dungeoncraft is a grand oral tradition passed from DM to DM that stretches all the way back to Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. If it works, the following advice will help you get up and running even if you don't have access to a veteran.

Action and Reaction

The AD&D® game is one of action and reaction. As the DM, you begin the session by describing a scene or situation. The players react by describing the actions they wish to take. You react to their descriptions by deciding and announcing the outcomes of those actions. The players then react to the outcomes with new actions, and you react with still more outcomes. This process continues through the session and the entire campaign. The best way to illustrate is through the simple example in the box below:

Even this simple example reveals that the lion's share of DMing boils down to a trio of basic skills:

1. Providing effective descriptions.

2. Determining how to resolve the outcomes of the characters' actions.

3. Deciding when you should automatically reveal information and when you should force the players to specifically ask for information.

Providing Effective Descriptions

The first skill, providing effective descriptions, is by far the easiest to master. You've probably practiced it all your life. Giving accurate and interesting descriptions is an important part of the DM's job for a number of reasons, most of them obvious. If you can't effectively

YOU

You descend thirty-five steps into the dark, dusty tomb. At the bottom, you find a corridor that leads to your left and to your right for as far as you can see. In the distance you hear an eerie low moaning, sending a chill up your spine. What do you do?

You've just described a situation.

STEVE

I stop for a moment to listen to noise. Does it sound familiar?

Steve has just reacted to your description with an action an attempt to identify the sound you described.

YOU

No, it doesn't. It's unlike anything you ever heard before.

You've determined and related the outcome of Steve's action. Your adventure notes tell you that the moaning sound is produced by a wraith on the other side of the tomb. Since the players have never encountered a wraith before, you decide that Steve can't identify the sound. If the players had already fought a wraith during an earlier adventure, you might have ruled that Steve can recognize the sound.

PAULA

I search the area around the bottom of the stairs for secret doors.

Again, Paula is reacting to your situation.

YOU

(Rolling a die behind your DM screen.) You don't find any secret doors.

In this case, you didn't have to invent an outcome to Paula's action. The rules for finding secret doors in the DUNGEON MASTER® Guide tell you to roll a die to determine whether Paula discovers the door, presuming your adventure notes say that one exists. If there is no door, then Paula won't find one.

STEVE

(After a brief discussion with the other players.) We're walking down the corridor to the left.

YOU

The corridor runs on for fifty feet, then turns to the left. As you walk down the corridor, the moaning sound is getting louder.

You've reacted to the player's action. The moaning sound is getting louder because the players are moving toward the wraith.

STEVE

Hmm. We'll retreat back to the stairs.

Although Steve and the other players don't know about the wraith yet, they're guessing that the moaning sound is produced by some sort of monster, and they don't feel like they're ready for a fight.

Catch up on past installments of Dungeoncraft.
http://www.wizards.com/dragon/Welcome.asp

describe the rooms the heroes explore or the characters they meet, you'll only confuse the players and make it difficult for them to formulate actions in response to your situations. Neglecting to mention that open window on the north wall when the players are trapped in a burning inn, for example, might ruin your entire game. Similarly, droning on and on with boring descriptions of scenery is likely to put your players to sleep before the action even starts.

Although advice on improving your ability to provide descriptions is really the province of an English class, here are a few quick tips before moving on. First, if you're not completely comfortable inventing your own descriptions, stick with published adventures like those found in *DUNGEON® Adventures*. These offerings almost always include notes that help you describe the action and sometimes go so far as to provide complete, "ready to read" descriptions (usually boxed and shaded text). Although you'll still bear the brunt of the work, you're sure to find a good starting point incredibly helpful. After you get a couple of sessions under your belt, you'll almost certainly find yourself growing more and more comfortable with the notion of improvising your own descriptions. A simple tactic you can glean from the best published adventures is the idea of incorporating all of the heroes' senses into the descriptions that you create. Don't just tell the players what they see in the dungeon; tell them what they hear and even what they smell when appropriate. Done effectively, this will take some of the pressure off your shoulders by making your environment seem more real, allowing the players' own imaginations to fill any gaps or accidental omissions.

Also, never allow yourself to feel rushed while conducting a game session. If you're not sure what should happen next or how best to describe it, don't be afraid to pause for a few moments to think before you start talking. Your players certainly won't hold it against you, and, under most circumstances, the brief pause only adds another layer of suspense to the proceedings. Some beginning DMs tend to get nervous or "freeze up." Just remember, this is only a game. Nobody's grading you, and the very worst thing that can happen is that you and your friends will decide to let someone else DM for a while.

Resolving Actions

The second skill, resolving the players' actions, is a little more difficult to master, but it's still pretty straightforward. What makes this skill relatively easy to develop is a pair of powerful weapons that are at your disposal: the AD&D game rules and simple common sense.

Instructions for resolving many of the most common actions the players are bound to throw your way appear in the *Player's Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*. The rules tell you how to resolve armed attacks and attempts to cast spells, to turn undead, to find secret doors, and so on. The rules also tell you how to resolve many of the consequences that might arise from a character's actions. A thief who fails to climb a wall falls. The rules tell you just how much the fall hurts the thief.

It is precisely because the rules are so helpful in resolving actions that a good working knowledge of the rules is a minimum requirement for any DM. Generally, each of the game rules exists because the specific situation it handles is particularly hard to resolve credibly without assistance. Take the earlier example of the thief falling off the wall. Does she die from the fall? Break a leg? Survive completely unscathed? Any ruling you might make based solely upon your own whim is bound to seem totally arbitrary to the players, risking your credibility. An arbitrary decision here or there is relatively easy to accept, but long strings of arbitrary decisions tend to make the players start to doubt the impact of their own actions. After a while, they'll find it hard to make intelligent decisions because they have no idea how you'll rule.

Using the rules whenever possible makes it easy to make some tough calls because the rules leave little for you to decide. The rules also provide a reliable mechanism by which the players can predict the outcome of some simple actions while still leaving a great deal to chance. It's this fact that allows the players to make informed, intelligent decisions. A party of 3rd-level adventurers usually knows that they shouldn't mess with an ancient red dragon because even a cursory knowledge of the game rules reveals that the dragon will soon be picking bits of adventurer out of its teeth. Without consistent rules, there would be no way for the players to decide when a monster is worth fighting.

For all of these reasons, to be a good DM you must know as much about the game rules as possible. If you're not aware of some rules (and there are an awful lot to digest), you might find yourself making arbitrary decisions when it isn't really necessary. Making matters a bit more complicated is the fact that simply knowing the rules is sometimes not enough. Under some circumstances, you have to understand the intent of the rules to wield them capably. A perfect example might be the rules for saving throws; their true potential is often overlooked. The *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* tells us that a saving throw vs. paralyzation, poison, or death magic might be used to represent an extreme test of a character's physical fortitude or willpower. Suppose the prototypical damsel in distress is trapped in a burning tower and one of the PCs decides to run in after her. Does the attempt succeed? If you hadn't carefully read the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* you might be forced to make an arbitrary decision even though this is an ideal opportunity to simply call for a saving throw vs. paralyzation or death magic. If the saving throw is successful, the character rescues the damsel. If the saving throw is unsuccessful, the character is forced out of the building before he can rescue her.

Of course, the fact that the rules are useful doesn't mean that you should become a slave to them. It's often more important to keep the game moving than to make sure you're following each rule strictly. This advice probably makes it sound like it's going to be difficult to determine when you should carefully follow the rules and when you should just "wing it," but you're likely to find that such decisions are surprisingly intuitive during play. You'll quickly develop a feel for which rules seem too complex for your group and which seem relatively digestible.

When it comes to resolving those actions that are not covered by the rules, common sense is your most useful ally.

Once play begins, your players are going to throw all sorts of unexpected actions at you, and many won't be explicitly covered by the rules. It's at this point that you're forced to become both judge and jury. Do the actions seem plausible? What is their likely outcome? Suppose, for example, that the adventurers are trapped high up in a wizard's tower. To escape, they've decided to rip some bed sheets into strips so they can tie the strips together and fashion a crude rope. How long do you think it might take to fashion the rope and scale down? Unfortunately, the rules are of little use here.

The best way to beef up your ability to make this type of decision is to watch a lot of adventure movies and read a lot of fantasy novels. The last example illustrates an important point. You should never lose sight of the fact that the events that take place in your AD&D games are not supposed to reflect our own reality, but a world of grand adventure. In the real world it might be difficult and time consuming to shred bed linen into a useful rope. In movies and fantasy stories, though, the heroes do this sort of thing all the time. As a consequence, the tactic should work perfectly well in your games. The more stories you read and absorb, the better the feel you'll develop for handling these situations. Fortunately, few DMs have to be specially motivated to read fantasy stories and watch adventure films. If you're interested in the AD&D game, the odds are good that you're also interested in the stories that inspired it.

Revealing Information

The third and most difficult skill to develop is a good feel for when and how you should reveal information. Suppose that the adventurers hear a cry of distress coming from around the corner, deep in a dungeon. When you describe the cry, should you reveal that the voice sounds like that of the damsel the adventurers rescued from the burning tower a couple of sessions ago, or should you reveal that information only if one of the players specifically asks if the voice sounds familiar? Unfortunately, there's no easy answer to this dilemma.

These situations generally reduce down to a trade-off between revealing lots of information to keep the game moving and revealing only a little information to force the players to make more decisions and ask for more clarifications. Expert DMs tend to use the amount of information they reveal at any given time to pace their adventures in the same way that great movie directors control the pacing of their films. Consider a simple example: The adventurers have just entered an unpopulated dungeon chamber filled with various bits of broken furniture. Beneath an old shattered bed is a small sack containing 10 gold pieces. There are several ways you might describe this scene, each revealing various bits of information.

Method One

You enter a small chamber filled with broken bits of old furniture. From the doorway you can see what appears to be a small sack resting beneath an old shattered bed.

In this case, you're revealing everything. To get the gold, the players simply announce their intention to grab the sack.

Method Two

You enter a small chamber filled with broken bits of old furniture.

Here, the gold is now one step removed. To find it, the players must announce a specific intent to search the broken furniture.

Method Three

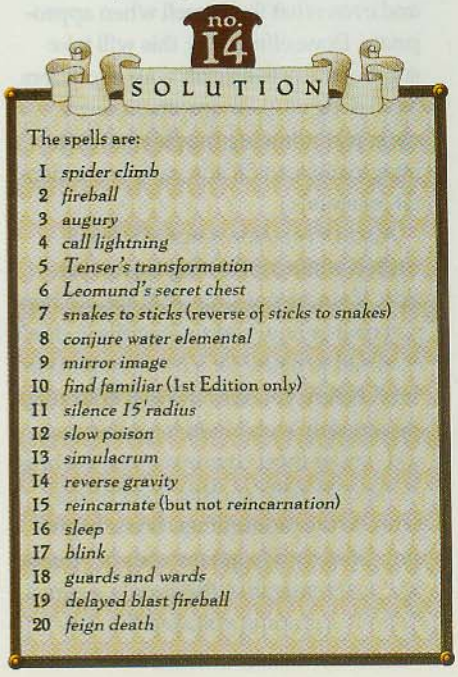
You enter a small chamber. Inside is an old smashed chair, two badly broken tables, and the remains of shattered bed.

This method makes the gold even harder to find. Simply searching the furniture isn't really possible. To find the gold, the players must announce a specific intent to search beneath the shattered bed.

Which approach is best depends upon the situation. If this isn't an important encounter, and you want the game to move quickly past it, you might select the first or second approach. If this is a crucial encounter, though, you might opt for the third approach to slow things down a bit and emphasize the action. Notice how the amount of information you supply in your descriptions dictates the amount of detail the players are forced to supply in return. Unfortunately, the only reliable method of gaining a feel for which approach is appropriate at what times is to earn it through hard experience.

In addition to slowing down play, another reason why you might sometimes opt to reveal less information is to challenge the players to make decisions, take actions, or draw conclusions. Suppose a dusty room in your dungeon houses a giant spider living in a camouflaged web that stretches across the ceiling. Instead of immediately describing the web, you might describe a set of dusty footprints that lead into the middle of the room and suddenly stop. It's now up to the players to recognize that something must have dropped down to kill the owner of those footprints in the room's midst, prompting them to specifically examine the ceiling and find the hidden web. If the players don't grasp the significance of the disappearing footprints and simply blunder into the room, you might rule that the spider takes them by surprise, putting them in a bit of a pickle. This is a great example of the sort of "puzzle" you should try to incorporate into your games. (See issue #266.) Deliberately withholding some information is often a necessary component of making such puzzles work.

Ray Winninger is a ruthless neo-capitalist by day and a long-time contributor to DRAGON Magazine *by night. Next month marks Dungeoncraft's 20th installment.*



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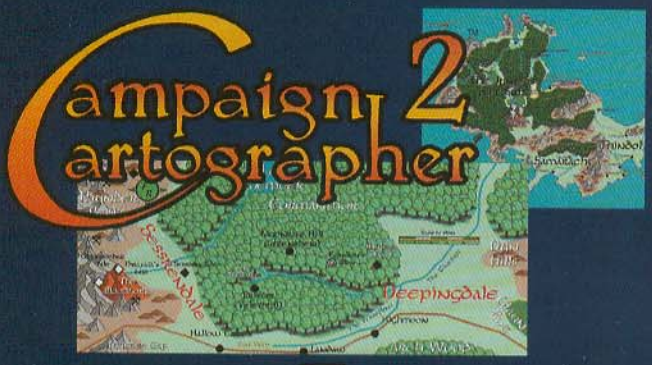

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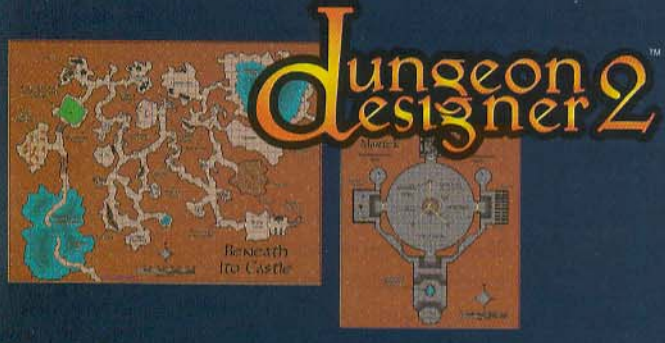

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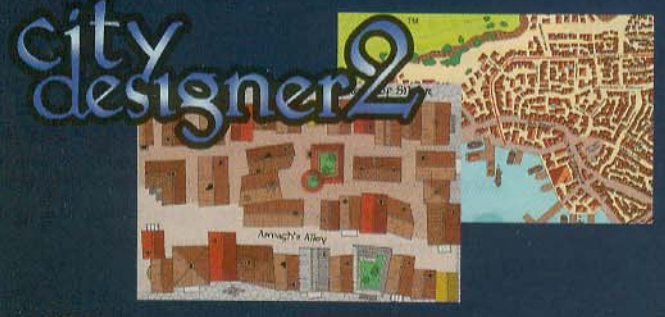

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Sage Advice

Need Some Help With Your Game?

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The Sage cannot make personal replies;
please include no SASE with your questions.

By Skip Williams

This month, the sage considers the gritty problem of petrification and other arcane mysteries of the AD&D® game.

Do you have to write a spell into your book in reverse to be able to memorize it in reverse? Does this process take extra time to memorize or extra space in the spellbook?

No in both cases. The spell is written into the spellbook normally and prepared normally, except that the character preparing the spell has to choose either the regular version of the spell or the reverse. It is up to the DM to decide what makes a spell reversible. Perhaps a spell's casting instructions contain a few extra notes on how to read the reversed spell as opposed to the regular version. (These notes are not long or complex enough to make the spell any longer to copy or cast.) Certain spells might simply lend themselves to "reversing."

Can a sha'ir use a spelljamming helm?

(Perhaps the character reads parts of the spell, or the whole spell, backward.)

Does falling unconscious from a *sleep*, *color spray*, or similar spell cause a spellcaster to lose the spells in her memory? How about going unconscious as a result of the Hovering on Death's Door optional rule?

Being put to sleep or knocked out by a *color spray* spell doesn't wipe spells from a character's mind. Nor does being knocked out by a punch. Being sent to death's door does wipe spells from a character's mind—it is a much more severe condition than any of the other examples.

Can a sha'ir use a *spelljamming helm*? The rules seem to indicate that powering and controlling the *helm* depends on memorized spells or spell-like abilities, but sha'irs don't cast spells like other wizards—they receive their spells through their mastery of a gen. Can the gen itself use the *spelljamming helm*? If a sha'ir can somehow spelljam in wildspace, would there be any way for the sha'ir to spelljam in the phlogiston? A gen wouldn't be able to retrieve spells if it followed the sha'ir into the phlogiston, and the sha'ir wouldn't be able to summon the gen if it didn't accompany the sha'ir into the phlogiston. Right?

A sha'ir could use a *helm*, but she would have to have her gen with her. Spelljamming depletes the gen's spell-gathering potential for the day.

By itself, a gen couldn't use a *helm*. As "Sage Advice" has pointed out many times before, gens have a legendary ability to wiggle in and out of odd corners of the multiverse to get spells for their sha'irs. A gen can indeed exit the phlogiston to fetch spells for its sha'ir.

I understand the general mechanic for finding secret doors, but I'm not sure how it actually works in a game. How does a character who is not an elf find a secret door? Many modules I've read contain areas in which it is necessary to find and use a secret door to continue, but the small chance to actually succeed at this task seems counterproductive. What happens if no one successfully detects such a door? Must the party return later and try again (this hasn't worked well in my games), search longer, or simply fail outright?

A human or other non-elf finds a secret door on a roll of "1" on 1d6.

The *Dungeon Master® Guide* says a character can search a section of wall for secret doors only once. (See Concealed and Secret Doors in Chapter 15.) I recommend, however, that you allow characters to search for secret doors as many times as they like, but that each search takes the requisite 10 minutes per 20-foot wall section. If you want to save time during play, just assume that a full hour spent searching a 20-foot wall section automatically reveals any secret door hidden there.

Is there a way for a mage to create magical items and not lose Constitution in doing so?

Yes, just use the *enchant an item* spell and cast a *permanency* spell as part of the enchantment process. Note that there are four ways to cast *permanency*:

On the caster: 1 point of Constitution lost.

On another creature: 1 point of Constitution lost.

On an area: 1 point of Constitution lost.

In conjunction with an *enchant an item* spell: 5% chance for a 1-point Constitution loss.

When I read and DM an adventure there are usually numerous magical effects, such as traps. How do I determine what level the creator of each magical effect was?

Read the module very carefully; the caster level for each magical effect should be in there somewhere.

If you can't find a caster level, just assume the caster level is the minimum required to cast the spell, plus one. For example, *symbol* is a 9th-level wizard spell, which requires an 18th-level caster. An unknown *symbol* spell would therefore be cast at 19th level.

Can a multiclass fighter have exceptional Strength? What about a dual-classed fighter?

Yes, and so can any other multiclassed character who has a class from the warrior group. Note that some races disallow exceptional Strength. A multiclassed halfling fighter, for example, could not have exceptional Strength.

A dual-classed warrior does not lose exceptional Strength when switching to another class, but a character who does not already have exceptional Strength does not gain it when switching to a class in the warrior group.

Is it possible to combine the 1st-level priest spell *strength of stone* with the 2nd-level priest spell *draw upon holy might* to get a Strength score of over 19, even if your normal Strength score is only 9?

No. In general, you cannot combine two magical effects that do the same thing (such as boost your Strength score). You also couldn't combine either of these spells with the 2nd-level wizard spell *strength*. You could, however, use *strength of stone* to boost your Strength score and use *draw upon holy might* to boost another ability score at the same time.

A thief in my campaign has just acquired a *sun blade*. The item description in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* says it is handled like a short sword, but I assume it is still a slashing weapon, not a piercing weapon, and cannot be used by the thief to backstab. Is that right?

You're right that a *sun blade* is a slashing weapon. (It's a bastard sword.) However, you don't need a piercing weapon to backstab; you just need a melee weapon on the thief's weapon list. Since short sword is on the thief list, you can backstab with a *sun blade* when you're using it like a short sword—but sneaking up on an opponent while holding the glowing *sun blade* might be tricky.

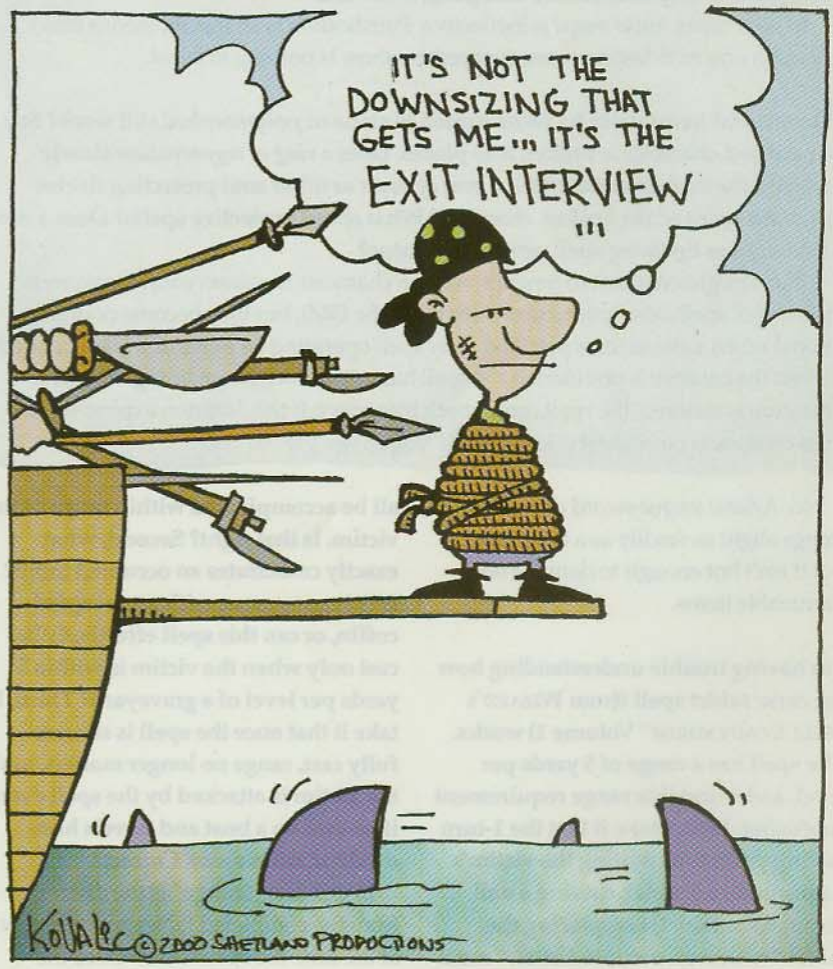
When you use a character point to reroll during play, do you have to spend the point before rolling? In other words, is it spent even if you make the original roll?

You must make your decision to spend a character point before you roll any dice. If a roll is successful, you don't have to spend the point. If the roll fails, you must spend the point and reroll. (If you have the point to spend, you can declare your intention to spend a point on the reroll, too.)

If you've saved character points for use during play, it pays to keep your mind on the game and think about which rolls are going to be the critical ones; otherwise, you'll wind up spending your points on rerolls that don't really matter.

The *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* says that a *flame tongue* sword can easily ignite flammable items. If an NPC parries or disarms a PC's melee weapon with a *flame tongue* sword, would this require an item saving throw against magical fire for the PC's weapon?

The Unspeakable Oaf by John Kovalic



The Shapeshift Shuffle

Suppose a creature with shapeshifting ability, perhaps a doppelganger or werewolf, is *polymorphed* into an elf (or any other form). Does the creature retain the ability to shapeshift? Or is the ability lost because the creature is now an elf?

The ability to change shape goes with the creature's mind, not its body. A creature that has such an ability can assume its own form the round after being *polymorphed*. This effect breaks a *polymorph other* or *polymorph any object* spell.

If a character using a *polymorph self* spell becomes petrified, does she retain the shape she was *polymorphed* into? What happens when the *polymorph self* spell ends? Does the statue change shape?

When petrified, the subject becomes a stone version of whatever its form currently happens to be. A character *polymorphed* into a snail, then petrified, becomes a stone snail. The creature is locked into the current stony shape until the petrification effect is broken. Note that petrification disables the subject mentally, so there is nothing the subject can do to break the effect. A creature with an innate shapeshifting ability (see previous question) cannot escape petrification by changing shape.

The *polymorph self* spell description says the user changes back to his own form when killed. If the *polymorphed* character is petrified, then killed by being broken, what happens? If the shape does not revert because of the change to stone, what is the status of any items that were *polymorphed* along with the character?

Breaking the statue does not break the petrification effect. The character's body and all his items remain stone, whether the character was *polymorphed* or not.

How does *dispel magic* affect a being turned to stone by the *flesh to stone* spell compared to a special ability, like gorgon's breath?

In both cases, *dispel magic* is ineffective. Petrification is an instantaneous effect (though one with lasting consequences), so there is nothing to *dispel*.

Do magical items worn by those turned to stone or *polymorphed* still work? Say a petrified character is broken into pieces. Does a *ring of regeneration* slowly rebuild the broken statue? Will a *gem of souls* or other soul protecting device grab the spirit of the broken character? What about protective spells? Does a *protection from lightning* spell protect the statue?

Items might continue to function when a character is *polymorphed* (the various *polymorph* spell descriptions leave this up to the DM), but they become nonfunctional when a character is petrified. Any spell operating on a creature is suspended when the creature is petrified. If the spell has any duration remaining when the creature is restored, the spell comes back into effect. If the duration expires while the creature is petrified it is lost.

No. A *flame tongue* sword can set things alight as readily as a torch can, but it isn't hot enough to damage nonflammable items.

I'm having trouble understanding how the *curse tablet* spell (from *Wizard's Spell Compendium*™ Volume 1) works. The spell has a range of 5 yards per level, and I find this range requirement confusing. First, I take it that the 1-turn casting process of writing the victim's name on a lead tablet; driving a nail through the tablet; and placing the tablet "within an occupied tomb" must all be accomplished within range of the victim. Is that right? Second, what exactly constitutes an occupied tomb? Is it synonymous with an occupied coffin, or can this spell effectively be cast only when the victim is within 5 yards per level of a graveyard? Third, I take it that once the spell is successfully cast, range no longer matters, and the victim is attacked by the spell even if he gets on a boat and travels hundreds of miles away. Correct?

In this case, "range" is the distance from the completed tablet and the victim at the time the spell is cast. Once the spell is complete, the distance between the victim and the tablet is irrelevant, although the spell is not effective if the tablet is not on the same plane as the victim. An occupied tomb is any structure that houses the remains of a dead being, which could indeed be as simple as a coffin. Your DM might define "occupied tomb" more strictly. For example, the "tomb" might have to be occupied by a "person" (a humanoid of human size or smaller) or by a being with an Intelligence score of 3 or higher.

Given the spell's rather short range, any fairly low-level caster must be pretty ingenious to use this spell successfully. For example, the caster might have to smuggle a coffin into the victim's basement, lure the victim to a graveyard, or catch the victim at a funeral.

Page 9 of the *Domains of Dread* book says that each and every Necromancy spell requires a Ravenloft® Powers check, yet the Powers checks table has an entry only for evil Necromantic spells.

The text on page 9 is misleading. Necromantic spells that are not "evil," such as *cure disease*, do not require Powers checks—although its reverse, *cause disease*, does. The lists of altered spells in chapters 8 and 9 identify most of the spells from the *Player's Handbook* that trigger Powers checks. These lists have some curious oversights. For example, the various *inflict wounds* spells are not included, but they should be. If you're using the *Wizard's Spell Compendium* or *Priest Spell Compendium*™ books, you'll need to compare the spells in them to the altered spells in chapters 8 and 9 to decide which ones trigger Powers checks. In general, spells that harm the subject's life force or spirit require Powers checks, as does any spell that inflicts a curse.

If a character fails a saving throw vs. a monster's *fear* power, will she run away the entire time she is affected, or will she run only until she doesn't see the monster anymore? If the character is forced into a corner where she cannot run and the monster still closes in and attacks, does this break the *fear* effect, or does the character just cower in the corner? Or does the character try to break out of the corner so she can run farther?

Unless you find something to the contrary in the monster's description, assume a *fear* effect is just like the 4th-level wizard spell *fear* cast at a level equal to the monster's Hit Dice. Cornered creatures fight normally, but there's a chance they'll drop what they're holding. (See the spell description.)

The *wall of ice* spell has a variation that allows you to crumble the *wall* and thus approximately duplicate the *ice storm* spell, right? A player of mine says that the *ice storm* effect has the same duration that the *ice wall* variation has, and therefore the *wall* crumbles over and over again. Is he right?

If a *wall of ice* spell is cast so that it falls and inflicts damage, it's gone. The *wall* can fall and break only once.

I've got a character with a *ring of blinking* and a *cloak of displacement*. Can those two items have an effect together?

Yes. When the character is attacked, first check to see if the *ring of blinking* foils the attack. If the *ring* does not foil the attack, resolve the attacks exactly as you would against any other person wearing a *cloak of displacement*. Note that the *cloak* foils the first attack a foe makes against the character, but if the *ring* foils the attack, the attacker hasn't really attacked the character (because the character *blinked* away before the *cloak* had any effect).

If the target of a *charm person* spell makes his saving throw, does he realize a spell has been cast at him? What happens if the target fails his saving throw? Does the target know he's under an enchantment? Once the *charm person* spell has ended, does the target realize that he was *charmed*?

I strongly recommend that creatures know something is up when they make successful saving throws. The creature should be aware of some sort of twinge or unpleasant tingle. Some DMs even allow the subject to make a Spellcraft check to identify the type of spell.

I also recommend that creatures not notice when they fail their saving throws (at least not while the spell cast on them lasts) unless the spell produces some noticeable physical or sensory effect. (It's pretty hard not to notice a *fireball* engulfing you.)

In the case of *charm person*, it's a good bet that an intelligent character who has been compelled to do something he wouldn't normally do will know that something was amiss. The less ordinary the subject's actions, the more likely the subject is to realize someone tampered with his mind. For example, if a PC uses a *charm person* spell to get a tightfisted merchant to give him a big discount, the merchant should wonder what made him give the PC such a good deal once the spell wears off. The PC should look out for squalls if he ever meets that merchant again.

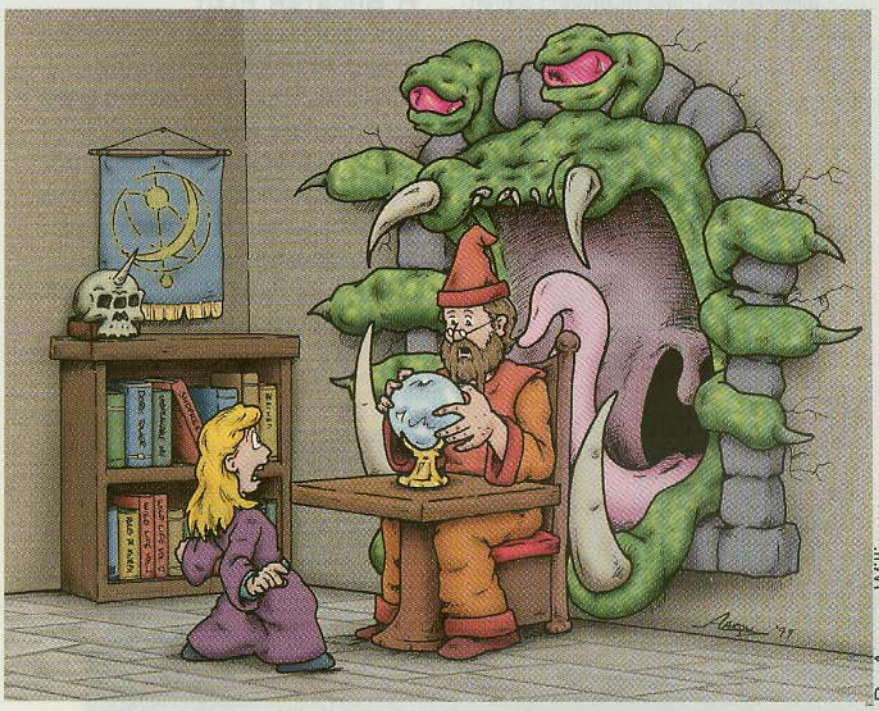
On the other hand, the more ordinary the subject's actions, the less likely the subject is to realize he has been enspelled. For example, if a PC ducks into a shop while running from the town guard and uses *charm person* to persuade the merchant not to turn him in, the merchant probably will be none the wiser (particularly if the merchant wasn't too honest to begin with). If the PC then buys something from the merchant for a generous sum, the merchant might well remember the PC fondly.

Say a neutral good PC successfully uses a *charm person* spell on a neutral evil NPC. Does the NPC's alignment change while under the *charm* effect?

If the target of a *charm person* spell makes his saving throw, does he realize a spell has been cast at him?

The *charmed* character's alignment is unchanged, but the power of the *charm* still makes the character regard the *charm* caster as a trusted friend. The *charmed* evil character might be dumbfounded by her actions while under the charm, though (see previous question).

Skip reports that he definitely fended off several charm *attempts while dealing with bankers and contractors for work on his Seattle area home recently. Skip also admits trying a* charm *or two himself during the process and discovered that you really can't make the subject do anything against his nature.*



By Aaron Williams

"HUH! THAT'S WEIRD... IT JUST WENT BLANK!"

Role Models

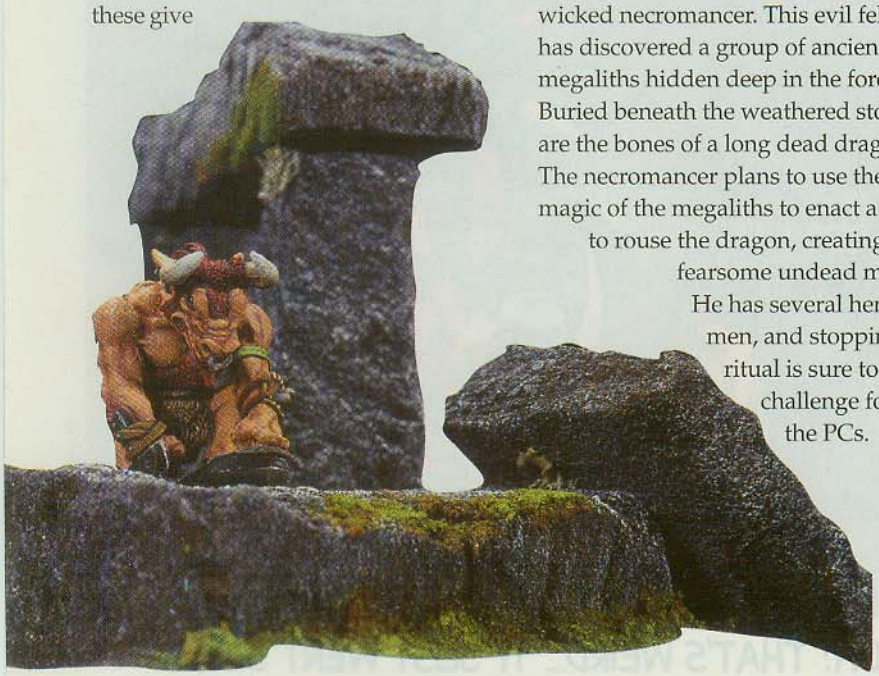
Made to Order

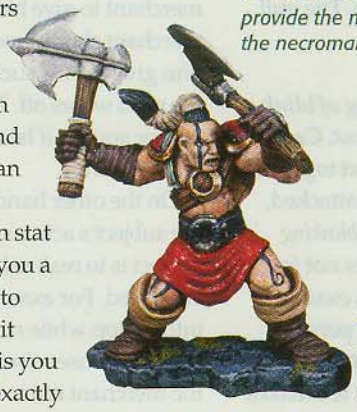
By Chris Pramas

Photos by Craig Cudnohufsky
Miniatures painted by Jason Soles and Ben Tracey
Dioramas by Kim Graham

How many times has this happened to you? You're about to run an adventure, and you realize you don't have the miniatures you need. You scramble around the house, trying to find the right miniatures for the adventure. No one's collection is all encompassing, so sometimes you have to use substitutions. Maybe the orc figures have spears instead of swords, or maybe your carrion crawler is going to double for a purple worm tonight. In the end, you find enough minis to make the adventure work, but you haven't used the medium as effectively as you could.

The above scenario is especially prevalent when using published adventures. Any long-time DM is bound to create new adventurers, however, and these give you more freedom to customize the enemies and monsters the PCs are going to face. Instead of making up the opposition and then trying to find the right mini, you can pick the figures you want to use first, then stat them up. This gives you a visual starting point to build that NPC, and it ensures that the minis you use on the table are exactly what they appear to be.





These two barbarians provide the muscle for the necromancer's plan.

A Sinister Plot

By way of example, let's say that I'm writing an adventure featuring a wicked necromancer. This evil fellow has discovered a group of ancient megaliths hidden deep in the forest. Buried beneath the weathered stones are the bones of a long dead dragon. The necromancer plans to use the magic of the megaliths to enact a ritual to rouse the dragon, creating a fearsome undead monster. He has several henchmen, and stopping his ritual is sure to be a challenge for the PCs.

The Necromancer

I came up with this adventure after seeing the necromancer miniature from the DIABLO II set. With the general outline done, I need to give him some statistics. I want him to be a classic necromancer, so I decide that he's a wizard. Of course, wizards can't use scythes, so I need to work the rules a bit to make that legal. I could make him a dual-class character, perhaps a former death priest or fighter. This doesn't really fit in with my conception of the character though, so I solve the problem by creating a new magic item, the *staff of slaying*.

The *staff of slaying* appears to be nothing more than a *staff +1*. However, if the proper command words are spoken, a blade of pure darkness springs from the haft, turning the *staff* into a *scythe +3* (1d6+4/1d8+3 damage, including magical bonus). The *staff's* user can spend one charge to command undead as an evil cleric of the same level, or spend two charges to cast the *animate dead* spell at 12th level of effect. The *staff* can be recharged, and the scythe function works even if it has no charges left.

3E Minis on the Way

As everyone knows, next month is the launch of 3rd Edition D&D® game. The miniatures team has been hard at work, preparing a new line of figures for simultaneous release. These new minis reflect the look and feel of 3rd Edition and provide minis for many of the new player character options. Pictured here are some of the first "greens" for the 3rd Edition figs. The initial release consists of twenty-four blisters, with more to follow. These will be the best miniatures ever sculpted for the D&D game, and we'll be showing off more of them in the next issue.

The Henchmen

Even with his scythe, the necromancer is not eager to leap into hand-to-hand combat. This unpleasant task he leaves to his two barbarian henchmen: a human and a dwarf. I decide that these two characters are from primitive tribes, and they serve the necromancer due to his power over the dead. The barbarian kit from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook* is perfect for these two, so I use those rules to stat them up. I also decide to use some of the special rules from that book, as they seem appropriate for the characters. The dwarf, therefore, is specialized with the two-handed axe (1d10/2d8 damage) and the two-hander style (reducing the speed of his big axe to a zippy 6). Since he wears no armor, I opt to give him some tribal fetishes that act as a *ring of protection +4*.

You'll note that the human barbarian (again from the Diablo II set) wields a battle-ax in either hand. Normally, this is a no-no in the AD&D® game, but once again the *Complete Fighter's Handbook* comes to the rescue. This fighter specializes in the battle-ax and the two-weapon fighting style. This allows him to fight with weapon of the same length in either hand, making him deadly with those axes. These barbarians should be tough opposition for any party.

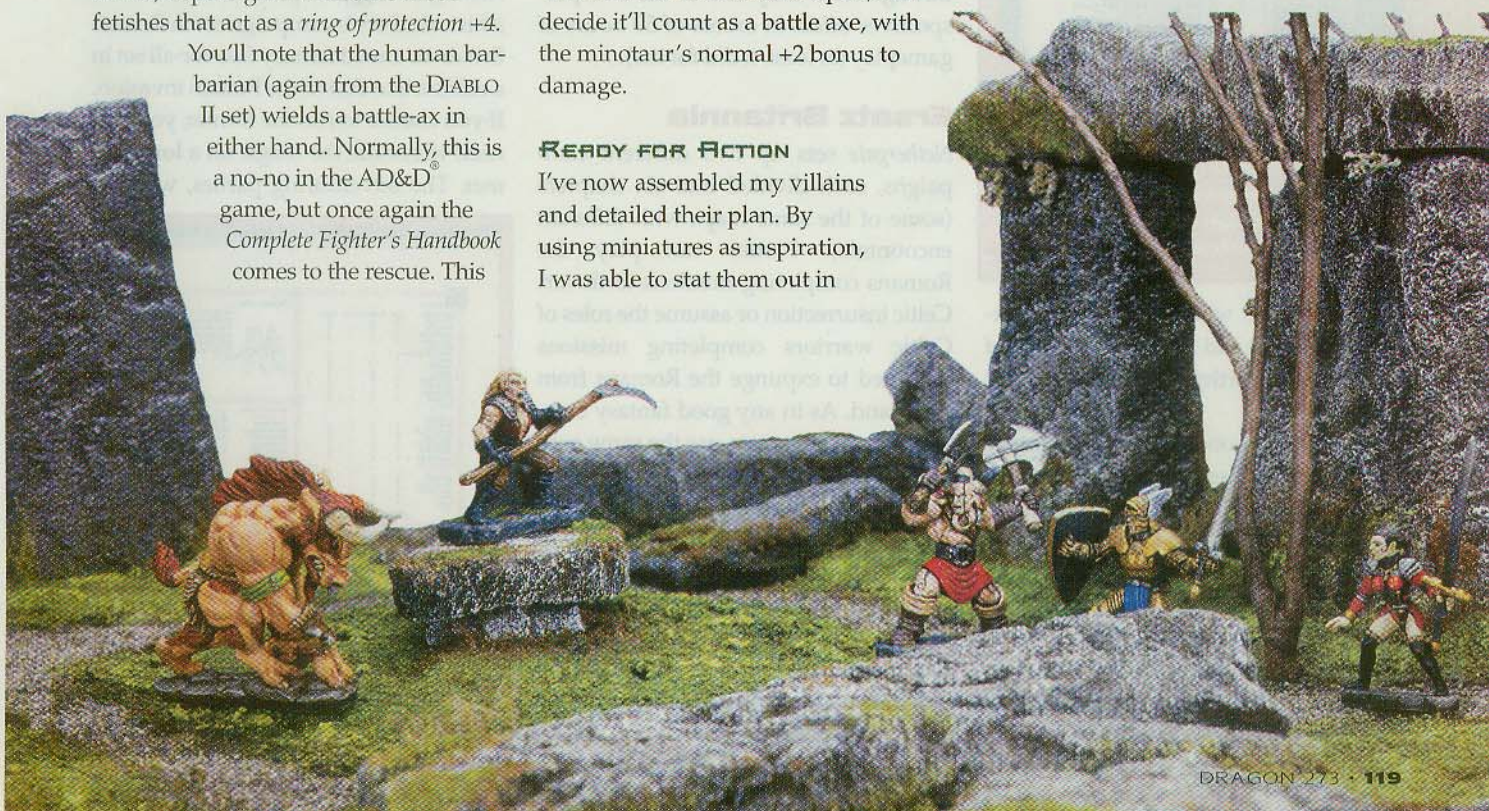
The Minotaur

The final lackey of the necromancer is a minotaur. Figuring out his statistics is the easiest of all, since the *Monstrous Manual*™ book description fits the figure perfectly. His pose, nose down and ready for a charge, should remind me that he can charge with his horns and inflict double damage. The only decision I need to make is how to treat the blade strapped to the minotaur's arm. This is not a traditional weapon, so I decide it'll count as a battle axe, with the minotaur's normal +2 bonus to damage.

Ready for Action

I've now assembled my villains and detailed their plan. By using miniatures as inspiration, I was able to stat them out in short order and create some interesting background details (perhaps to be exploited in further adventures). It also allowed me to prepare some nasty surprises for my players, and led me to create a new magical item. Players often view the Complete Books series as solely for their benefit. They won't be so happy with those rules when they are turned against the party!

Chris is busy concocting a special project for this year's Dragon® Magazine Annual.

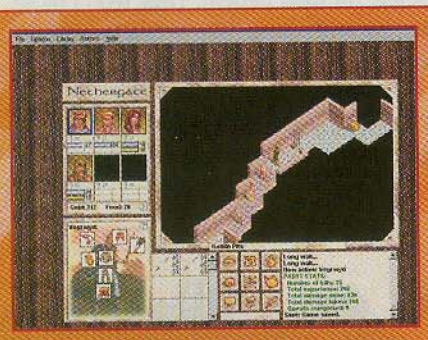


Celts & Kilts

By Johnny L. Wilson

How *Nethergate* Melds History and Fantasy

Spearmen clad only in blue tattooing from the waist up emerge from forest shadows. Giant demigods called Fomor tower above the peasants, inspiring obedience with their grotesque visages and distorted physiques. Brigantes and Iceni seek to cleanse their world of their Roman conquerors. Druid covens meet in the forests. Crones mix potent mixtures like the witches in Shakespeare's Scottish play. Warriors collect the skulls of their enemies. Such is the nexus point between authentic history and Celtic mythology. It is an ill-served era in most fantasy campaigns.



REAR VENUE
In a grand adventure tradition, the first dungeon romp in *Nethergate* gives you the chance to sneak up on the goblins through a little-used entrance.

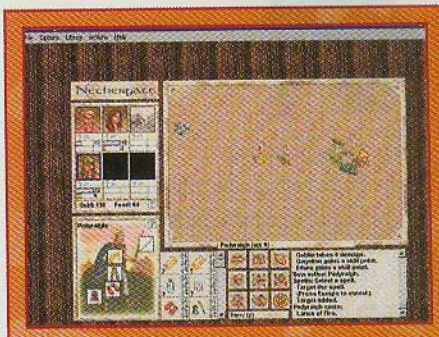
Yet, it is an era with an intriguing mixture of custom and mystery—a cache of components worthy of the strongest plot potions.

Nethergate is one of the rare fantasy roleplaying games to explore a fantasy setting in the midst of Celts and Romans. As a shareware game, available only through order via the web, you get the chance to judge for yourself via a detailed demo version of the game downloadable from such sites as ZDNet's extensive Shareware Library (**www.zdnet.com**) or try out Spiderweb Software's own corporate website (**www.spidweb.com**). Not only does *Nethergate* attempt the rare exercise of blending this era of history into a fantasy roleplaying game but also it allows you to play either a band of Celtic warriors on a mission from the gods or a cadre of Roman warriors attempting deeds of valor while occupying a hostile land. Better yet, the difference between the Roman perspective and Celtic campaign is more than the fact that Romans wear armor and self-respecting Celts don't. Missions and areas of hostility are as distinctly different as they should be.

For roleplayers on the personal computer, *Nethergate* offers a fascinating little romp through a mythic era of history while one waits for the "bigger" games with more bells and whistles. At $30.00, *Nethergate* offers a terrific price-to-performance ratio. Even playing the game through from only one of the two perspectives offers in excess of 50 hours of gameplay (at least, it did for me).

Ersatz Britannia

Nethergate sets up two different campaigns, each divided into six chapters (some of the same maps with different encounters). Parties can play the Romans completing missions to thwart Celtic insurrection or assume the roles of Celtic warriors completing missions designed to expunge the Romans from their land. As in any good fantasy campaign, both story arcs use the same general conditions to set up the missions or scenarios where the party can retrieve lost artifacts and clear away threats at their challenge level. *Nethergate*'s weakest element is that too often the missions in both campaigns surround recovering the macguffins such as the Skull of Stone, Eye of Cathrac, and Crown of the Lost Warriors. Its strongest element is the interweaving of Celtic influence in representatives of the Seelie Court, the ritual of the Wicker Man, and an appearance of the Wild Hunt.



GUTSY GOBLINS
Tactical combat in *Nethergate* features phased actions and a mana-based magic system.

DM Notes

Nethergate suggests possibilities for both a historical-style campaign set in Roman Britain or a wild fantasy free-for-all set in a culture like that of the Roman invasion. If you choose to run the former, you will need to handle the magic on a low simmer. The adventuring parties, whether

POINT GUARD
Character creation in *Nethergate* allows players to beef up their basic attributes and skills by taking on disadvantages to counterbalance the advantages.

STORY ABOARD
Nethergate is full of a significant number of text descriptions for locations and conversations. Many of them offer neat ideas for encounters.

Roman or Celtic, would run into sinister covens of druids who smell of blood, hint of power, and threaten ominously, as well as isolated crones who were strong in the lore of herbs and nature and filled with tales of the old gods and ready to place curses at the drop of a leaf. The parties would hear rumors of powerful demigods like the Fomorians and their supernatural powers, but such creatures would be best hidden in the shadows of the campaign and allow the characters to unveil the web of superstition, cultural misunderstanding, and limited magic around the race over the course of the story arc. In this type of low magic campaign, players should never be sure how much of a potion is magic and how much it is a pre-medical prescription. They should never be sure how much of a curse is magic and how much is a psychosomatic reaction.

Of course, in a more traditional *Nethergate*-style campaign, the sky's the limit. Strong and capricious faeries capture prisoners in the endless dance, conjure hordes of wild animals or shadow animals to fight for them, call out wild magical effects from every element of nature, and mouth curses that bear no resemblance to psychosomatic effects (the party knows they have been affected right away). These Sidhe can serve as benevolent, or at least benign, patrons or as annoying influences that allow the DM to inject new, campaign-balancing obstacles and sidequests without disrupting the overall campaign arc. The sidebar contains some scenario seeds for a *Nethergate*-style campaign.

Sidhe Seed

The following encounters were inspired by *Nethergate* but are not necessarily the same as they are encountered within the game context.

1 When traveling through the forest, the PCs see strange lights and hear tantalizing music. The source is, of course, a faerie circle, and the midnight dance is underway. The PCs are mesmerized by the dance, and all of their weapons and equipment are stolen during the night. In an open fantasy campaign, the characters must enter the circle and be transported to an Otherworld locale to retrieve their possessions, which are hidden in a faerie treasure cache. In a historical campaign, they will have been ambushed while watching a coven dance and will have to find a burial mound with a dungeon maze below it in order to retrieve their goods. In either case, they will have to rely upon their innate skills and/or magic, as well as makeshift weapons they find on their way to the cache in order to get their treasure back. (Note: Some players hate this sort of situation, but it is a great way to challenge high-level characters with adventures designed for lower-level parties.)

2 The brother of a party member has been imprisoned by a druid coven that intends to sacrifice him as part of a burning man ceremony. The party receives word just as they are returning to their village after completing a scenario in the quest. To rescue the brother in a high fantasy campaign, the party must face a circle of magic-wielding druids while most of the crowd watches in abject fear. If the druids are defeated and the brother is rescued, the party will be ostracized by the community and must make saving throws vs. a *curse*.

3 A cave opens from the side of a cliff, and the PCs glimpse a misshapen giant within. They have heard tales of the fomorians, but this is the first time they've encountered one. The cave should feature annoying encounters like bats, wolves, rats, and/or bears, but the fomorian encounter should be the climax. In a pure fantasy campaign, add the spell kit listed below. In a historical campaign, use the physical statistics, but give the fomorian a saving throw vs. death for every attack (halving damage upon success) for phenomenal Dexterity in spite of his appearance. The fomorian statistics are: AC 3; MV 9; HD 13+3; hp 73; THAC0 9; #AT 1; dmg by weapon + 8; SA Surprise, spells; SD Surprised only on a 1; SZ L; INT average (10); AL NE; XP 6,000. Spells (3/3/2/1): 1st—*entangle, faerie fire, remove fear*; 2nd—*charm person, enthrall, hold person*; 3rd—*remove curse, summon insects*; and 4th—*call woodland beings*. Treasure: 3 copper torcs (8 cp each), 2 silver torcs (7 sp each), 1 gold torc (10 gp), 10 emerald gems (12 gp each), 1 bar of tin (4 gp) and one potion (which summons 1d6 sprites).

4 The PCs come across an isolated hut in the forest. There, an old crone is annoyed with their presence and places a curse on the party. They find themselves with black decaying spots on the backs of their hands and discover that all attacks suffer a –2 penalty until the marks are removed. The crone wants a grisly payment for removing the curse. She wants the amputated head and hands of a Roman officer for each party member afflicted. Once the grisly trophies are delivered, the spots will immediately disappear from the hands and the –2 penalty goes away.

5 Along a section of road built by the Romans, the PCs discover paintings of Celtic warriors in full blue tattooing. The Celtic images look normal, except for the fact that they have skulls in place of living heads. The party feels queasy and somewhat frightened by these images, as though they have been magically affected by viewing them. In a full-blown fantasy campaign, the party can discover that each tattoo shape on the images has a different power, equivalent to 1st-level priest spells. Roll percentile dice for each of the five tattoo shapes on the images. There is a 15% chance for each tattoo shape that the individual party member will have that shape painted on his or her body. If they find that shape, they will have a once-per-day use of the appropriate spell. The suggested spells are *bless, entangle, faerie fire, protection from evil*, and *remove fear*.

6 The party discovers a dead body. If they search the body, they will find a horn of uncanny craftsmanship. If this is a pure fantasy campaign, the horn radiates magic. In a historical campaign, it has unknown markings. In the fantasy campaign, blowing the horn when the party is not in combat causes the Wild Hunt to appear. To represent the Hunt, use twice the number of PCs atop *phantom steeds*. Their abilities are mirror images of the PCs' skills and attributes, but without magical items or spells. The party is likely to be defeated. If they are defeated, they are restored to the quest under the proviso that upon death, they cannot be raised but will immediately join the Wild Hunt. In a more realistic campaign, blowing the horn when not in combat will cause the party to be ambushed by a party of brigands—twice the number of the party at: AC 8 (leather armor); MV 12; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (spear); SZ M; ML 12; INT average (10); AL CN; XP 35. Treasure: 5 sp each.

Nodwick in:
Slave the Last Dance for Me!
WARNING
SLAVER SHIPS
I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THE SLAVERS ARE BACK! THEY'RE MORE PERSISTANT THAN THOSE "POLICE ACADEMY" PLAYS AT THE GLOBE!
I WONDER WHERE THEIR HEADQUARTERS ARE THIS TIME.
WELL, JUST HOME IN ON NODWICK AND YOU'LL FIND OUT.
HOME IN ON NODWICK? WHY?
AND HOW WILL THAT HELP?
UH, I JUST SOLD HIM TO A SLAVE BARGE. I THOUGHT ONE OF YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO USE A SPELL TO FIND BOTH HIM AND THE SLAVERS.
YOU SOLD NODWICK?!
CALM DOWN, PIFFANY. HOW MUCH DID YOU GET FOR HIM?
A BENT COPPER PIECE, AN ORANGE RIND AND A LINT BALL! NOT BAD, HUH?
OUR HEROES SEARCH FOR THEIR HENCHMAN...
WE'VE SEARCHED EVERY CITY ALONG THE WILD COAST! WHERE COULD HE BE?
WAIT... ISN'T THAT HIM OVER THERE?
JOIN THE CULT OF THE EARTH DRAGON! IF THE DRAGON ATE YOU TODAY, WOULD YOU BE READY FOR THE AFTERLIFE?
HAVE A COPY OF "DRAGONETICS: YOUR GUIDE TO BEING AN APPETIZER."
MY POTION OF OPRAH SHOULD BREAK HIS CONDITIONING. IT GIVES YOU TWO YEARS OF MOTHERLY ADVICE AND INTERESTING GUESTS IN TEN SECONDS.
WHAT HAPPENED?
IT WAS AWFUL! THEY INDOCTRINATED ME INTO THEIR CULT AND MADE ME A LITERATURE LACKEY!
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE A SLAVE...
AS A HENCHMAN, I WAS OVERQUALIFIED.
DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE THEY TOOK YOU?
YES, AND WE HAVE TO GO THERE TO SAVE THE CHILDREN! THEY'RE BRAINWASHING KIDS AND MAKING THEM INTO CULT SOLDIERS!
I THINK I KNOW JUST THE THING TO BREAK THE CULT'S SPELL...
THIS IS DEMEANING!
THIS IS WRONG!
TELL YOUR FRIENDS: ALL OF THE GUARDS HAVE AN ULTRA-RARE "MEW II" CARD IN THEIR LOWER INTESTINES!
THE SLAVERS' TRAIL LEADS TO THE DRACHENSGRAB MOUNTAINS.
DIDN'T WE DESTROY THEIR LAST CITY NEAR HERE?
THEY MUST HAVE A THING FOR VOLCANOES.
THE SLAVER CITY IS ON THE SLOPES OF MOUNT DRACHENKOPF. ANY IDEAS ON HOW WE'RE GOING TO SNEAK IN?
SIDEKICK A CRATER
LATER...
HI! I'M A REPRESENTATIVE OF McFARLANE-BRADSTREET IRONWORKS. I'M SELLING RESTRAINTS GULAG-TO-GULAG.
SORRY, WE DON'T NEED NO MORE CHAINS 'N' STUFF.
AH, BUT MY WARES ARE ALSO...
M-B
"Your Link to Success!"
WELCOME TO: KALEN LEKOS
POPULATION: 750
1250 FOR SALE!
FASHION ACCESSORIES!
"I'VE NEVER LOOKED BETTER WHILE HAVING NO HOPE FOR ESCAPE."
SCRIPT

AN INDUSTRY IS BORN...
WE CERTAINLY WON THE TRUST OF THE CITY! I CAN'T KEEP UP WITH THE ORDERS!
UH, AREN'T WE FORGETTING SOMETHING, GUYS?
NOT THAT I KNOW OF. THE NEW FALL LINE IS READY TO ROLL!
I THOUGHT WE AGREED THAT IRON MASKS WERE GOING TO BE HANDLED BY CONTRACTORS!
ARLANE-BRADSTREET
NWORKS
AFTER A SUSPICIOUS FIRE DESTROYED THE SHOP...
HI, MARKESSA! WE'RE HERE TO THWART YOUR EVIL PLANS AGAIN!
YOU! I'LL CRUSH YOU AND FEED YOUR CORPSES TO THE EARTH DRAGON!
HANG ON, NOW... WE AREN'T LOOKING FOR A FIGHT.
WE ROUNDED UP SOME OF THOSE DUPLICATE MARKESSAS THAT YOU'VE BEEN MAKING, AND...
WE HAVE AN ALTERNATE CAREER FOR YOU.
A FEW MONTHS LATER.
RABID FANS ARE PREFERABLE TO SLAVES, ANYWAY...
VICE
GIRL
PRIME MATERI
PLANE TOU
OUR HEROES ENGAGE THE CULTISTS.
I THINK WE'VE RUINED THEIR CHANCES IN THE ALL-CHURCH SOFT-BALL LEAGUE!
GUYS? WHAT ABOUT HIM?
YOU ARE DOOMED! I WILL SEND YOU THROUGH THE DRAGON'S MAW MYSELF!
NEVER STAND TOO CLOSE TO AN OPEN MAW!
YOU COULD HAVE THROWN A CULTIST, YEAGAR!
HONESTLY, THAT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME.
NOW YOU FOOLS WILL TASTE THE WRATH OF THE--
TAP! TAP!
EEP!
WHAT IS THIS? I GIVE YOU POWER, RICHES, AND NIFTY ROBES, AND THIS IS THE THANKS I GET? A HENCHMAN SACRIFICE?! ARE YOU INSANE?
UH... THEY DID IT!
IS THAT TRUE?
NO, SIR! WE SAW HIM DO IT!
HE'S RESPONSIBLE, ALL RIGHT!
I THINK HIS EXACT WORDS WERE: "LET'S SEE OL' SCALE-FACE CHEW ON THIS FOR AWHILE."
THIS IS GOING TO HURT ME MORE THAN IT'LL HURT YOU. I THINK...
IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE'S GOING TO NEED AN ORGAN DONOR!
SO I FIGURE THAT I'M UP TO NEEDING THIRTY-TWO YEARS OF THERAPY THANKS TO YOU...
WITHOUT US, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE DISCOVERED THAT YOU'RE IMMUNE TO SLAVERY AND RITUAL SACRIFICE! I THINK THAT'S WORTH A CHRISTMAS CARD THIS YEAR!

Coming Attractions

July

The Halls of Stormweather

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by Ed Greenwood, Clayton Emery, Lisa Smedman, Dave Gross, Voronica Whitney-Robinson, Richard Lee Byers, and Paul Kemp

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A FORGOTTEN REALMS Novel
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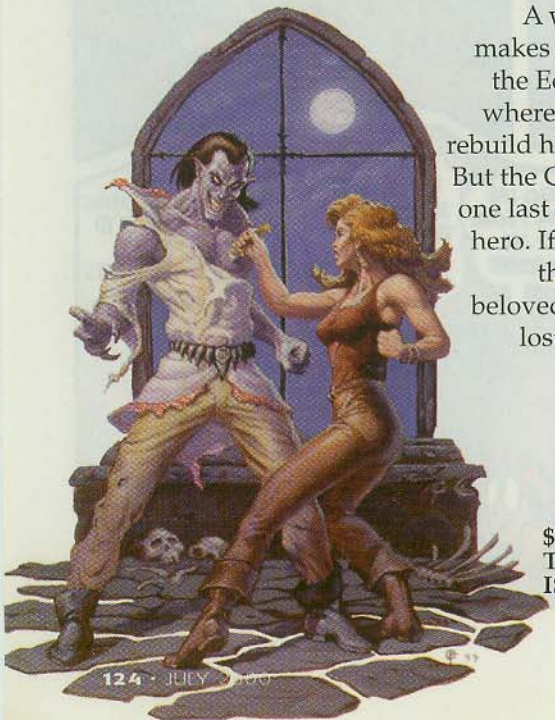
A weary Cadderly makes his way back to the Edificant Library, where he can begin to rebuild his shattered life. But the Chaos Curse has one last surprise for our hero. If he fails to meet the challenge, his beloved Danica will be lost to him forever.



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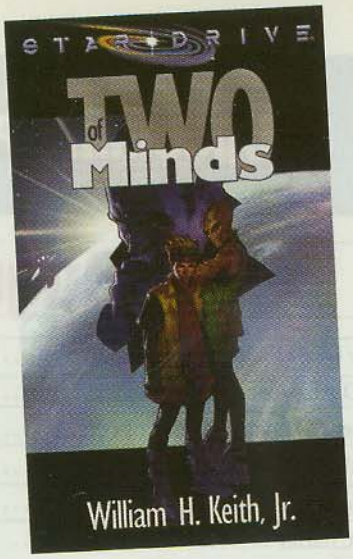

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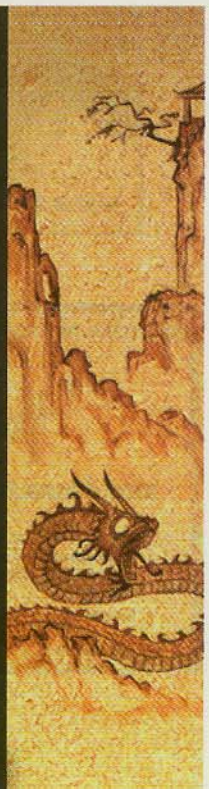

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Upcoming Product Guide

August

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Death of the Dragon	FR Novel	$7.99
In Hollow Houses	DM Novel	$6.99
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September

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New D&D Dungeon Master's Screen	Core Product	$9.95
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Gamer's Guide

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WHAT'S NEW WITH PHIL AND DIXIE

HEY- TODAY WE'RE TALKING WITH THE 'PRESIDENT' OF WotC ABOUT ROLEPLAYING GAMES.
ROLE-PLAYING GAMES?!
SURE - I KNOW YOU LIKE THEM.
I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THEM NOW.
OH, REALLY?
YEAH.
RUNNING WotC IS A FULL TIME JOB, AND I LOVE IT! TRADING CARD GAMES ARE SO POPULAR THAT I'VE MANAGED TO MAKE MILLIONS AND FIND JOBS FOR ALL MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY. EVEN COUSIN ZEKE!
'97 98 99 STILL 99
THIS YEAR, WE OPENED OUR OWN GAME STORES, SUPPLIED BY OUR OWN DISTRIBUTORS, AND SOMETIME NEXT YEAR, WE'LL START CLONING— OUR OWN CUSTOMERS! ROLEPLAYING GAMES NEVER DID THAT!
GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL!
#6233
SURE - ROLEPLAYING GAMES ARE FUN - HECK, I LIKED 'EM SO MUCH, I BOUGHT THE COMPANY!! BUT RUNNING WIZARDS OF THE COAST IS THE ULTIMATE GAME, BABY, AND I'VE WON!
THAT'S RIGHT!
CONGRATS, PETER! WELL DONE! TIME TO LET SOMEONE ELSE PLAY.
'PLAY'?! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU'VE BEEN BETA TESTING 'MOGUL MADNESS,' THE BIG-BUSINESS ROLE-PLAYING-GAME - AND YOU WON!
MOGUL MADNESS
WHAT?! THIS WAS ALL A... A GAME?!
YEP! PRETTY ADDICTIVE, HM?
BUT... BUT...
COME ALONG NOW, TAKE OFF THAT SUIT- (IT'S RENTED).
WE'VE HAD YOUR T-SHIRT CLEANED, AND HERE'S A COMPLIMENTARY PIZZA - WITH EXTRA CHEESE!
'CAUSE NOTHING'S TOO GOOD FOR OUR FAVORITE PLAYTESTER!
AND NEXT WEEK WE'LL BE PLAYTESTING THE POKÉMON RPG!
HERE'S YOUR COSTUME!
POPPA GANDALF'S PIZZA
#3 TO KISS
I... I SHOULD BE UPSET, BUT... BUT THIS FEELS SO RIGHT.
POPPA GANDALF'S PIZZA
GAMER SPECIAL!
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE FELL FOR THAT.
HEY - ONCE A GAMER, ALWAYS A GAMER.
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Be thee like a ruby, blossom in the tomb, red vessel of fire, defying deaths gloom.

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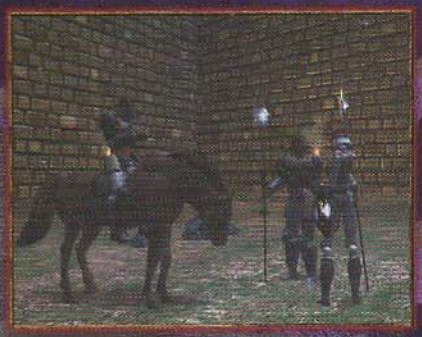

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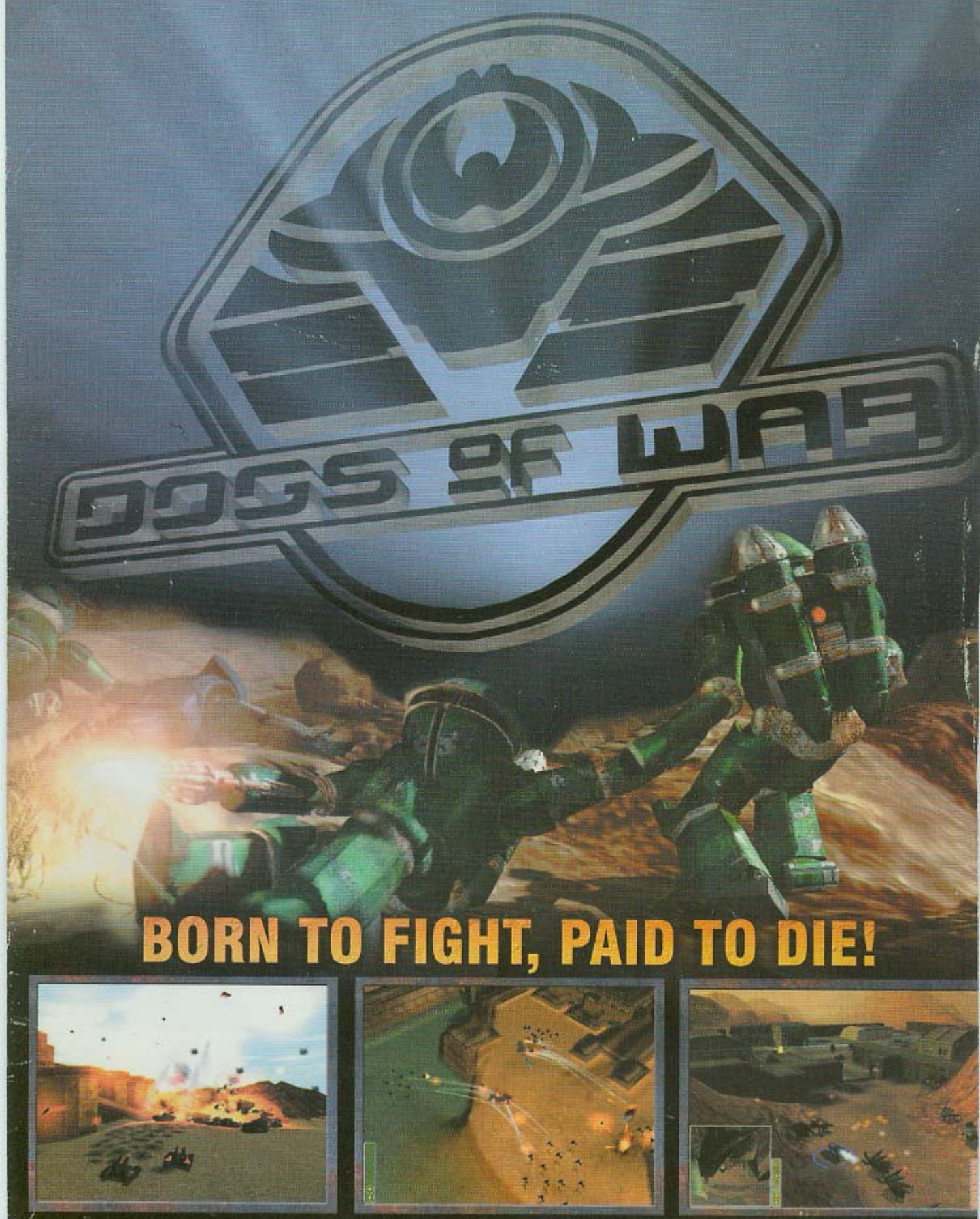

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